



# Kent Academic Repository

**Armon Azoulay, Ellie (2021) *Reclaiming the Lore: A Critical Reading of the Archives and Practices of Collectors of African American Folk Music in the American South, 1900-1950*. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent.**

## Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/89033/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

## The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.89033>

## This document version

UNSPECIFIED

## DOI for this version

## Licence for this version

CC BY (Attribution)

## Additional information

## Versions of research works

### Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

### Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

## Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact [ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

**Reclaiming the Lore: A Critical Reading of the Archives and Practices of Collectors of  
African American Folk Music in the American South, 1900-1950.**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor in philosophy

Elie Armon

[Ellie Armon Azoulay]

Centre for American Studies

University of Kent

90,101 words

March 2021

## Acknowledgments:

I-i'm getting the spirit in the dark  
(Um-hum-hum)  
I'm getting the spirit in the dark  
(um-hum-hum)  
People moving oh and they grooving  
Just getting the spirit  
(Um-hum-hum) in the dark  
Tell me, sister, how do ya feel?  
Tell me my brother-brother-brother  
How do you feel?  
A do you feel like dancing?  
Get up and let's start dancing  
Start getting the spirit  
(Start getting in the spirit)  
Spirit in the dark  
(In the dark)

(Doot-doot)  
It's like sally walker  
(Do-do-doot-doot)  
Sitting in a saucer  
(do-do-do-do-do-do)  
That's how ya (doot) do it  
(Do-do-doot-doot)  
It ain't nothing  
(Do-ooo-do-ooo-doot-doot) to it  
Riiiiide sally ride  
(Do-ooo-do-do-do)  
Put your hand on your hips  
Cover your eyes  
And move  
(Move)  
With the spirit  
(With the spirit)  
Go on an move  
(Move)  
Move with the spirit  
(With the spirit)  
Oh move  
(Move)  
Move with the spirit  
Now-now-now  
(With the spirit)  
Move with the spirit

First verse and chorus from 'Spirit in the Dark,' written by Aretha Franklin, track number six on her album *Spirit in the Dark*, August 24, 1970. The chorus of the song consist of her variation of the folk song 'Sally Walker' mentioned in more details in the first chapter.

On August 16<sup>th</sup> 2018, six months into the start of my PhD, Aretha Franklin – the Queen of Soul and my favourite musician of all time – passed away at the age of 76. She was the first musician I knew by name and whose voice I could recognise as a small child. My father used

to play her music at an unreasonable volume, sharing our love for the singer with the entire neighbourhood. Beyond her deep, versatile voice and exceptional touch on the keyboards, I think that my love for Aretha Franklin's work is ultimately rooted in her polyphonic music repertoire which knew no boundaries and was not confined to any one genre. Her talent, skill and immersion in the spirituals, gospel, blues, jazz, soul, country, rock & roll and even disco are unparalleled. Aretha's body of work amounts to a voyage through the history, traditions, development and innovation of Black music in North America across generations. When she died, I realised that in my scholarship I had been following her all along, encompassing her musical terrain and approach in my research. Since childhood I have never ceased listening to Aretha Franklin, and over the years I loved to weave her songs into all of my DJ/radio sets too. Still, after news of her passing, I methodically surveyed and played her entire catalogue, providing hours and hours of listening pleasure, an experience which was equally humbling and inspiring. Aretha's all-inclusive, nearly encyclopaedic, repertoire guided me throughout my research: how to identify, dismantle and avoid hegemonic, purist, hierarchical and dismissive discourses, and instead to seek and follow other routes that favour the realm of emotions together with practices of love, care, respect and collaboration; and how to honour the memory of the dead as well as the living. This dissertation is not *about* Aretha Franklin but it is animated by her influence and dedicated to her memory.

'Reclaiming the Lore' is about collectors of African American music but it is equally about methodologies and different modalities of thinking and living. Over the last six years, the process of immersing myself in Black Feminist thought, the Black radical tradition and practices of decolonisation have been profoundly transformative. These schools of thought have shaped my understanding of the systemic, structural mechanisms (and legacies) of imperialism and white supremacy and they have had impacts on not just the context of my work but also my knowledge of the world(s) we are still living in. These schools of thought lit



up for me a range of intellectual, emotional, poetic and caring scholarly practices that differed from my previous experience of other academic disciplines and their gatekeepers. To name all of these scholars, thinkers and practitioners here would produce too long a list, but my entire dissertation is imbued with their influence and wisdom.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Mike Collins, my supervisor, who from our first email exchange – even before I submitted my first application – showed interest and faith in me and my project. I want to thank him for the support and care, for always challenging me intellectually and pushing me to better articulate myself and my arguments, for our many interesting conversations, and for his good humour. Even when he had concerns at times, the trust he had in me was a precious gift. I sincerely hope that my dissertation is worthy of this trust. I also want to express my deep gratitude to David Stirrup, my secondary supervisor. He was always there for me as his student and as his colleague while I was teaching for the Centre for American Studies and the School of English. I am grateful for the opportunities he provided for me to contribute to the teaching at the Centre and the School including the chance to try out new approaches. As a supervisor, David's encouragement and his critical observations and comments were always helpful and insightful. From both of my supervisors I have learned so much which I will take forward with me.

In my four years at the University of Kent, I've had the good fortune of having a very collegial and supportive community of fellow students and staff who have shared their research, knowledge, feedback and support on various topics – from writing to teaching to job applications. All contributed to this project's realisation: Will Norman, Stella Bolaki, Erik Mathisen, Ben Marsh, John Wills, Jill Caddell, Michael Docherty, Jack Dice, Irene Lopez Sanchez, Claire Taylor, Jenny Humphrey and Jacqueline Basquil.

My PhD was funded by the University of Kent Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship. Periods of research in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee were made possible by the generosity of the Christine and Ian Bolt Scholarship and the British Association of American Studies (BAAS) Short Travel Award.

During my research trip to the USA, I was hosted generously by faculty members, archivists and students. They shared both their time and their knowledge – professional, local, historical and musical. They helped me in so many ways, from transcribing scribbled handwriting to finding good gigs and dining gems, or offering lifts to the only person who would dare to come to the rural American south on a research trip without a driving licence. Their work is precious and vital. I hope I have not left anyone out here: Rachel Morris, Martin Fisher, Yvonne Elliott and Greg Reish from the Centre of Popular Music in Murfreesboro, TN; Delisa Minor-Harris at Fisk University Special Collections in Nashville, TN; Holly Smith and Kassandra Ware at Spelman College Archives, Atlanta, GA; Mark D. Davis, Richard Schellhammer, Valerie Burns, Tina Naremore Jones and Jordan Mahaffey from the University of West Alabama; and Sheila Blackmon Limerick from the Julia Tutwiler Library and Archives in Livingston, AL. I want to extend special thanks to Todd Harvey from the Folklife Center at the Library of Congress for sharing his broad knowledge and helping me to access crucial materials remotely. Special gratitude is expressed to Rebecca Cureau who wrote her dissertation on Willis Laurence James in the year I was born, and since then has not stopped caring for and advancing his legacy and contribution. I am privileged that I had the opportunity to exchange emails and speak with her over the phone from her house in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and to receive her comments, feedback and encouragement.

I was fortunate to present parts of this research and work in progress at conferences in the US and the UK, and I am indebted to fellow delegates for their many friendly comments and constructive criticisms. My participation in these academic events was supported by

BAAS, Historians of the Twentieth-Century United States (HOTCUS), the Royal Historical Society (RHS) and the African American Intellectual Historical Society (AAIHS).

I am grateful for the contribution of several people with whom I've presented and from whom I've learned, as well as those who have read proposals, chapters and papers and offered valuable feedback: Daphne A. Brooks, Richard King, David Murray, Jennifer Chochinov, Lawrence Davies, Noam Maggor, Jennifer dos Reis dos Santos, Deborah Molloy, and Lisa Clarkson for editing.

This has been a long and challenging ride, and I would not have made it through without the love, support and encouragement of my family: my father Yarden Armon, my sisters Renana and Hagar, my brothers Nimrod, Ourie and Eyal; Adi Ophir, and my great friends around the world. My dependency on these people was deepened with the outbreak of the pandemic and the difficulties it brought. I would like to thank my mother Ariella Aïsha Azoulay who since I was a child instilled in me the confidence to pursue things even when they seemed impossible or even unacceptable in certain circumstances by the norms and standards of various institutions, from the nation-state, to school and even academia. My mother's ethical compass, creative aesthetic, and exemplary, courageous model of engaged knowledge have accompanied me throughout this journey. Finally, my infinite gratitude goes to my partner Yonatan Vinitzky who agreed to move from Paris to Canterbury with a newborn and a four-year-old child, with no family or friends around to help or spend time with. It was a sacrifice. He had to soothe my stress and worries but he was also the first to celebrate with me my achievements and excitement. We built a home together in the precarity of this life, and soon we are ready to pack and move on to our next adventure. Lastly, I want to thank my children Emilia and Anton who, despite being the worst sleepers and wonderfully rebellious souls, learned to respect my work especially during lockdown conditions when we

were all confined under the same roof. I hope one day when they are older, they will be proud of me – proud of the four of us, that we made it.



Aretha Franklin, by Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images, ca. 1968.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores different approaches to collecting African American music in the United States elaborated by African American collectors as part of what I call ‘Reclaiming the Lore’. The departure point of the dissertation is that white collectors’ practices of collecting African American folk music are embedded in slavery and its legacy and they reinforce structures of white supremacy and power. The study explores the key role of national institutions such as the Library of Congress in securing white collectors’ monopoly during the New Deal era and in shaping the history of the field. It challenges the category of the white expert collector who was assumed to be specialised in the culture(s) of the historically disempowered people (who were mostly denied opportunities to inhabit such positions) while enjoying access and accolades.

At the heart of this dissertation is the project of reclamation developed and practised by generations of Black people across the diaspora. The reclamation project and its importance is reconstructed from scrutiny of the work and passionate commitment of African American collectors and the individuals and communities who performed the songs. The dissertation traces various forms of refusal to comply with structures of white supremacy and subjugation, applying theories of fugitivity as well as community building and empowerment. Focusing on the American South from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, the study uses underexamined material from local archives to explore the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Willis Laurence James and John W. Work I, II and III and highlights their extensive collaboration and exchange with wide networks of people committed to recording, performing and enlivening African American folk music. The dissertation inverts the racial dynamic in the field of collecting: by shifting white collectors to the background and putting African American collectors at the centre, it offers a different mapping of the field of collecting which seeks to decentralise, diversify and decolonise that field via an interdisciplinary study of

musical recordings, archival documents, letters and photographs. This endeavour is committed to challenging and overturning the power structures behind the commonly held picture of the field predicated on the exclusion of African American performers and collectors. Chapter I examines how the practices of white collectors such as Ruby Pickens Tartt, John and Alan Lomax justified and reinforced inequalities and the systemic lack of access and progress for Black performers and collectors and promoted a deference culture among them. Chapter II offers a close reading (and listening) of a recording session by Zora Neale Hurston, an employee of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP). Challenging her inscription in the national archive as only a performer, the chapter spotlights Hurston's commitment to 'collect' despite overt gender and race discrimination. Chapter III reintegrates the radical practice of Willis Laurence James, which was part of his pedagogy and dedication to community building in the Rural South. Chapter IV explores the music making and collecting carried on by three generations of the Work family who were active in Nashville from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, studying their methods for protecting and passing-on musical inheritance. Building on these ideas, the dissertation foregrounds the physical and symbolic removal of Black cultural expressions from their creators in order to furnish white archives and institutions, and traces the resistance and reclamation by Black collectors as part of an overall project of empowerment. By prioritising the work of these Black collectors and reconstructing the lives of the performers, *Reclaiming the Lore* puts the human stories back into the history of collecting. It listens to how those Black musicians and collectors understood their practice, let their voices be heard, and sought to restore the tradition of folk songs.

## **Table of Content:**

Foreword	1-4
A Side	5-13
B Side	13-28
<b>Chapter I</b>	
‘At Homeness’: Proximity and Oppression in Ruby Pickens Tartt Collection	29-80
<b>Chapter II</b>	
‘And you who walk in humble places, think kindly too, of others:’ Zora Neale Hurston’s Practice of Collecting and Archiving as an Act of Care	81-114
<b>Chapter III</b>	
‘When we get tired of one we jes let it go:’ Rethinking Preservation in Willis Laurence James’ Practice and Collection	115-176
<b>Chapter IV</b>	
The Work Family – Collecting as an Act of Repair, Collecting as an Inheritance	177-244
<b>Conclusion</b>	245-256
Work Cited	257-285
Further Bibliography	285-290

# **Reclaiming the Lore: A Critical Reading of the Archives and Practices of Collectors of African American Folk Music in the American South, 1900-1950.**

## **Foreword**

At the beginning of my research on collectors of African American folk music in the American South, I came to realise that three African American collectors who stand at the heart of this dissertation could have actually met. The place and the context of this potential meeting could not have been more fitting. Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), Willis Laurence James (1900-1966) and John W. Work III (1901-1967) were among the most passionate and engaged collectors of African American folk music. All three were invited to act as judges in a music competition at the 1941 Fort Valley Folk Festival, in Fort Valley, Georgia. It was the perfect setting because this festival was the only African American-led folk festival in the United States at that time – a fact which should not be taken lightly, as Horace Mann Bond (who founded the festival) stated aptly: ‘The Folk need a festival of their own; people do not like to be on exhibition; they have come to Fort Valley College Festival because it was their own, and among themselves they felt at home.’ (James 203). James’s impression of the festival was very similar. He wrote ‘The people love the festival. They really own it. The festival moves by, through, and for them.’ (James 206). Such a meeting would have allowed the three collectors to get to know each other’s work more intimately and have fruitful exchanges with the broader community in attendance, in a setting that was seldom available to them. This opportunity was rare because all three collectors had been fully occupied for some time (and certainly during that year) in keeping their heads above water. They struggled financially and were continually improvising and striving to create spaces and opportunities in which to maintain their practice in a hostile landscape dominated by white collectors and institutions with more stability and resources.



In that same year, 1941, Hurston's various financial support systems and funding had come to an end, and she had just moved to California where she briefly worked as a consultant for Paramount Pictures. She was in the midst of writing the manuscript of her autobiography *Dust Tracks on Road* which was published in the following year. Her manuscript for *Barracoon*, consisting of the harrowing and incriminating testimony of the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade as told by Cudjo Lewis (who was considered to be one of the last survivors of that slave trade), had by that year gone unpublished for thirteen years. It only saw the light of day in 2018, decades after Hurston's passing. Similarly, fellow collector Work III had just published his *American Negro Songs* the year before, and was teaching at Fisk's music department where he was regularly disappointed by its white administration's denial of his well-deserved promotion to Chair.<sup>1</sup> The third member of this trio of collectors, James had just moved back to Atlanta where he taught in the music department of Spelman College. During that time, he was completing his manuscript *Stars in de Elements* which despite positive responses was rejected by various white publishers.<sup>2</sup> It was published posthumously in 1995. Both James and Work III were overwhelmed with heavy teaching loads and compelled to carve out time for collecting during the weekends and holidays. Like Hurston, they financed most of their collecting endeavours out of their own pockets.<sup>3</sup>

These three collectors were working sporadically with the Library of Congress (LoC) under various circumstances (which will be detailed in the following chapters) and with Alan

---

<sup>1</sup> As Robert Gordon asserted, despite 'liberal policies' associated with Thomas Elsa Jones (Fisk's president who hired many African Americans), Work III 'never developed personal relationship with him'. Jones, he notes, passed over Work III for 'advancement for positions he was well qualified to hold'. That included the opportunity to direct the Mozart Society (Fisk Chorus) and three times the chairmanship of the music department 'in favor of whites' (Work III *Lost Delta* 9).

<sup>2</sup> In the Willis Laurence James collection in Spelman College Archives there are such rejection letters from W.W. Norton, Harpers and Brothers, and Prentice Hall Inc.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in a letter from 1938 to W.D Weatherford from Fisk's Humanities Department, Work III requested support for his research collecting trip stating 'I have already made three trips at my own expense' (Work III *Lost Delta* 6).

Lomax, whose status and affiliation with the LoC and other national institutions is such that his level of influence as a collector is incomparable. Not only were the trio poorly paid compared to white collectors, but their work and positions were exposed to a series of appropriations and exploitation which this dissertation examines. The extent of this appropriation is painfully evident in the fact that nearly all of the sound recordings they ever made are kept at the American Folk Life Center (AFC) at the LoC instead of in the collections that were established in the places where they lived and worked. For example, the collections of Work III and James are kept at two historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) (Fisk in Nashville, and Spelman in Atlanta, respectively), whereas Hurston's work is stored at various institutions with the greater bulk kept at the University of Central Florida – the state where she grew up and recorded the folk life and music that are present in her work.

The conditions of exploitation and appropriation accompanied and shaped the Black collectors' lives and practice, often foreclosing opportunities. The marginalisation of their work by the white institutions and collectors who dominated the field has meant that these Black collectors were always 'under': underpaid, underappreciated, undermined, and understudied by the hegemonic field. To build on Kathrine McKittrick's work on Black geographies (1947-1963), the outcomes of these conditions and the dominance and power of white collectors and institutions were destructive and at times prevented creative encounters which would enable these collectors to collaborate and celebrate folk life. Significantly, this postulated meeting between the aforementioned trio of collectors did not occur. Hurston could not make it. James, who directed the festival for several years, was there, and so was Work III. They recorded the unique atmosphere of the place in their writings and onto the acetate records that were supplied by Lomax. The recording machine and the blanks were loaned on the condition that all recorded materials be donated to the AFC.

This dissertation is an attempt to recreate this missed meeting, to bring Hurston, James and Work III closer together on these pages so that some of the potentialities of the encounter do not escape the ears and eyes of those who continue to research in this area – to give readers and listeners the chance to celebrate the trio’s work and experiences and to appreciate the attention and care they devoted to their material, as well as the unique methodologies, strategies and practices they developed despite the racial barriers that were put in their paths.

This introduction borrows its structures from the album format of A side and B side. This decision is not entirely an aesthetic one that reflects my interest and engagement with music. It is more a strategic decision: it allows me to establish two essential pathways of critique, both of them shaped by the work of the African American collectors examined in this dissertation. These two sides *run* throughout my argument. The first side concerns the necessity of gathering the work of these collectors, to inform a whole different mapping of the field, and the necessity of questioning the very parameters and concepts the topographical hegemony typically promotes. The second side is to confront the cultural hegemony of white collectors and their practices. This too will be done by building upon the work of these African American collectors. Such a format allows me to engage with and discuss these African American collectors not only through the terms of their historical marginalisation, for I know (and my readers will come to see) that these collectors were never at the margins.

\*

## Side A

Engaging with the field of African American folk song requires much consideration and care; as a field it has been established and dominated mostly by white men. They often devoted their lives to meticulous study of these songs and their compositions, considering every scale, every note, describing the sonic qualities of the performers' voices, ranges, and performances whether they were performed live or inscribed onto recorded discs. They studied each other's work and that of their predecessors in a way that seems impossible to surpass in professional expertise. This dissertation, however, is not an attempt to add to the kind of knowledge they produced. On the contrary, it avoids claiming or employing an authoritative expertise on the music itself or its various meanings. This is not my wish, and nor do I believe it is my place, as a non-Black writer. This dissertation is committed rather to the exploration of different approaches and methodologies that are crucial to what I define as the act of 'Reclaiming the Lore.' This practice of reclaiming the lore is not new; I situate it among other practices of refusal to comply with structures of white supremacy and subjugation (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives*; Campt) and 'fugitivity' from those structures (Harney & Moten) that were developed and practised by generations of Black people across the diaspora. These acts of reclamation and refusal, as this dissertation demonstrates, were practised by African American collectors as well as by individuals and communities who performed these songs.

I am following Shirley Moody-Turner's commitment as expressed in *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*. She emphasises the importance of recognising 'African American as active participants, rather than merely passive repositories' of traditions and cultures as so many of these white collectors and generations of scholars have done (4). Noel Lobley's statement about the process in which 'the originators of ethnographic recordings "the musicians" are too often nowhere to be seen or heard in any on-going afterlife

of their recordings' (182) serves as a point of departure for this aspect of this dissertation. In their calls expressed in song and speech, these performers were drawing the line, refusing to sing (striking) or asserting one's independence, pride and the right to self-fashioning.<sup>4</sup> These calls expressed in song and speech stand out because of their creativity and the persistence of their makers. These performers were not often encouraged by most collectors. Far from it, some collectors were intentionally denying such possibilities of self-fashioning. This prevented the African American people they met from articulating and designing their inscription into the archives. This will be discussed in more detail over the course of the first chapter – the only chapter about a white collector – Ruby Pickens Tartt (1890-1974). These calls uttered by the performers emerged from a variety of contexts and geographies, as will be illustrated in the third chapter of this dissertation. In many of the cases, the calls were associated with the context of the work and the possibility of financially supporting oneself – whether self-employed like a coal vendor from Atlanta or a fishmonger from Jacksonville, or employees of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI) living and working in small mining towns outside Birmingham. Other calls for protest were concerned with the right to organise – as in the case of the longshoremen union from Savannah, Georgia, who often sang about their working conditions, the mistreatment and violence enacted by their white employers, the importance of union work and the right for equal pay. Focusing on these calls for action, I seek to echo the agency expressed in them. By shifting the focus of the research from the collectors back to the sources – the performers – this dissertation highlights how individuals and communities negotiated their place through song. This negotiation can be

---

<sup>4</sup> I am aware of the association of this concept of self-fashioning through the New Historicism and the work of Stephen Greenblatt (1980) and its inclusion within various academic disciplines, but while Greenblatt mentions slavery as part of the plays he discusses, he does not extend this concept or its investigation to enslaved people. However, the control and policing of Black people's appearance (hair styles, clothing, wearing accessories) was essential to the terror regime of slavery and is still occurring today. At the same time, the insistence on self-fashioning as a 'right' and as a practice is embedded in African American traditions that were developed in, against and outside slavery – conditions of bondage and attitudes of anti-Blackness that were ingrained since the Age of Enlightenment. Familiar examples concerning this practice can be found in the writings of Fredrick Douglass as well as in his negotiation and use of the photographed portrait.

broken down into three major stages: first, negotiating their place in a segregated world; second, negotiating exchange with the collectors; last, negotiating with the future generation of listeners and users.

This dissertation, then, focuses mainly on African American collectors who were engaged in collecting, performing and sharing folksongs. The meagre resources with which they worked and the scant recognition they had outside of their communities manifests the disparity with the white collectors who dominated the field. The first of the four chapters focuses on the collecting practice of Ruby Pickens Tartt, a white collector; it foregrounds the entanglement of race, labour and entertainment. At the centre of the second chapter is a close reading of and attentive listening to a recording session by Zora Neale Hurston as an employee of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) and its inscription in the national archive. The third chapter introduces the radical practice of Willis Laurence James which was part of his engagement with institution and community building. The fourth chapter explores three generations of the Work family and illuminates their collecting practice as a means to redress rupture with past generations and a commitment to transmit, retrieve and renew a legacy for future generations. Reclaiming the lore, as all these chapters show, serves to inform the writing and practices of these African American collectors. The chapter on Pickens Tartt is motivated by a complementary urgency – reading her work against the grain in order to seek redress for the lore of the performers from whom she collected. By researching the work of these African American collectors and highlighting their extensive exchange and collaboration with a wide web of networks of people committed to documenting and preserving African American folk music, this dissertation performs a substantially different mapping of the field of collecting.

By focusing primarily on collectors *from* the American South, rather than collectors who were *passing through* the South to collect its cultural production and capture its imagined

essence, this dissertation questions the persistent division between centre and margins. This framework will enable me to shed light on the key role that national institutions such as the LoC played in securing white collectors' monopoly in the field during the New Deal era of the 1930s and 40s. These collectors' practice (which has remained under-explored) was developed outside the designated and established fields of ethnomusicology, folklore or anthropology, and it took place far away from the assumed centres and institutions of this field such as New York, Newport, and Washington, D.C.'s American Folklife Center.

Furthermore, this study pays respect to and traces the extent of the connections these African American collectors had within various networks of collaboration they initiated, as seen in the third and fourth chapters. These networks offered exchange and support through and between Black-owned and led institutions such as HBCU and churches, which were part of a movement of resistance and independence. Therefore, the research foregrounds a horizontal approach that resonates with these networks of exchange and extends beyond the biographical constructs of individual collectors. This perspective affords a fuller picture of these collectors' methodologies and the different uses or contexts of their collected materials – from educational purposes through to performance or as part of community life and recreation.

Many scholars have previously criticised a range of exploitative practices and the perpetuation of stereotypes enacted by specific individual (white) collectors such as Newbell Niles Puckett, Lawrence Gellert, Howard Odum, Dorothy Scarborough, John and Alan Lomax, to note some (Mullen; Hamilton; Miller; Wade; Conforth). These scholars have even pointed out the racial conditions that facilitated these white collectors'/scholars' work and how the conditions endowed the work with a status that afforded them access, success and recognition. However, as I argue throughout the chapters on Hurston, James and the Work family, none of the scholars have accounted for the disproportionate exclusion of African

American collectors, or were even aware of the extent of this practice and the possibilities such research opens. By shifting the focus to African American collectors, this study examines how the privileges of white collectors often came at the expense of Black collectors' status and career opportunities.

This interdisciplinary study makes use of musical recordings, archival documents, letters, photographs and other visual materials to support my working hypothesis that the practice of these Black collectors was one of refusal, resistance and reclamation: part of an overall project of empowerment. These collectors resisted the status quo within African American folk music collection and exposed the limits of its domination by white collectors. They refused the conditions imposed on African Americans by the discriminatory and violent system of segregation. They refused to accept the material conditions of scarcity and they worked vigorously to remedy the neglect and the poverty and to create infrastructures and opportunities through music collecting, education and performance. These collectors reclaimed their authority in the face of denial and they reclaimed the centrality and the contribution of individuals and communities by centring their collecting on their lived experiences. By comparing Black and white collectors' practices, this dissertation highlights the entanglement of the latter's preservationist mission and notions of authenticity with institutionalised mechanisms of racial superiority. I also seek to argue how the practices of these white collectors served, reinforced and justified the embedded inequalities, the systemic denial of access and progress, and a culture of deference among both Black performers and Black collectors.

This study considers the ways in which the practice of collecting songs perpetuates an imperialist project and reinforces structures of white supremacy and power. It shows the commonalities and differences between song collecting and other practices of collecting and accumulating artefacts that originated within this imperial context. My approach is informed



by the urgency expressed in the last few decades in museum studies, Black studies, African studies and Native American studies with regard to colonial and imperial collecting practices and display (Golding & Modest, Modest, Rhodes Must Fall Movement, Assu, Kessi, Marks & Ramugondo). In their work on Native American artefacts taken between 1830-1930 and found in private and public institutions, Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Philips urge contemporary scholars to rethink the most fundamental questions – questions which are also pertinent to this dissertation:

‘who has the right to control [these] objects [...]? Who has access to knowledge (even simply the knowledge gained from gazing upon an object of power), only those who have been initiated, or all who pass through the doors of a cultural institutions? Who has the right to say what the objects mean and how they are displayed? (Berlo & Philips 6)

Similarly, in the field of folk culture, Charles F. McGovern asks ‘what happens when elements of indigenous cultures are projected into the national arena?’ (478). Most relevant to the context of this dissertation is the decolonising practice performed by African American musicians in recent years. Reclaiming the lore, they unfasten songs from their attachments to the collectors and institutional platforms, and show how the images and sounds contained in the archive can remerge with glamour in their new setting as images and sounds of reclamation and resistance. For the song ‘Freedom’ (in collaboration with Kendrick Lamar) from her album *Lemonade*, Beyoncé sampled two recordings by Alan Lomax. The first is a sample of a lining hymn performed by the Greater Harvest M. B. Church congregation and led by Reverend Crenshaw, who is also heard preaching, recorded in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1959. The second is a 1949 field recording from Parchman Farm, Mississippi State Penitentiary, of the song ‘Stewball’ performed by an unidentified group of prisoners led by Benny Will Richardson. ‘Stewball’ originated in eighteenth-century England. It appears in Child’s canonical collection and in the Roud Folk Song Index. The folk tale behind the song was attributed to the story of an underdog racehorse that won against all odds. After the song arrived in North America, it was adopted by enslaved people in the early nineteenth-century. It became associated with chain gangs and known as a work-and-shout song. Lomax made

various recordings of the song with different performers at different times. The recording of ‘Stewball’ was woven through Beyoncé’s song, the lyrics of which describe a situation of oppression and imprisonment, and practice fugitivity and call for freedom:

‘Freedom! Freedom! I can’t move. Freedom, cut me loose!  
Singin’, Freedom! Freedom! Where are you? Cause I need freedom too!  
I break chains all by myself,  
Won’t let my freedom rot in hell.  
Hey! I’m a keep running.’ (Beyoncé)

Moor Mother (Camae Ayewa) speaks about her music as an archive against oppression, violence and the marginalisation of Black people and history. She describes her approach as ‘taking that agency back’ (Ayewa). She samples from various sources – field recordings, old recordings of blues, jazz and spirituals (‘Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen’ by Paul Robeson) and the voice of Sandra Bland during her violent arrest by a white state trooper in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Rhiannon Giddens has been exploring African American folk music traditions and instruments for many years. Together with her former band, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, Giddens is committed to a transformative study of the history and the music of the banjo. Associated with minstrel music and assumed as an instrument of white country music, the banjo has been reclaimed by Giddens and her band who discuss its origins as an African American instrument, hand-made by the enslaved communities. Her album *Freedom Highway* includes a song inspired by the Slave Narratives collected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and titled ‘Come Love Come’, along with ‘The Purchaser's Option’ which is inspired by an advertisement of an enslaved person for sale.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 2015, Sandra Bland was pulled over by a state trooper in Texas for a routine traffic stop - ‘driving while black’ as Roxane Gay noted, whereby Black men and women ‘are pulled over every day for this infraction brought about by the color of their skin’ (Gay). Bland’s arrest, most of which is documented on camera, reveals her mistreatment by the white state trooper; her protest and how she was violently arrested. Three days after, at the age of 28, Bland was found dead in her jail cell. Following an autopsy report her death was ruled as a suicide but many justly point out that her death was the result of ‘a morally corrupt justice system’ as Crystal A. deGregory argues. Bland, she writes ‘a socially-connected college graduate sat in jail for three days because of a corrupt justice system and its pipeline to the prison industrial complex’ (deGregory).

Building on these questions and these practices, this dissertation builds a better understanding of what was at stake due to the physical and symbolic removal of these cultural expressions and traditions from the individuals and communities who created them. By removal I mean that while these white collectors – and the archives in which the documentation of these songs were kept – have benefited from them economically and culturally, the performers and their communities, whose lives were shaped by structured inequalities, were often left anonymous in these collections and were denied the very same possibility of ameliorating their lives and benefiting from the music they have composed or performed for others. One of the aims of this work is to put the human stories back into the history of collecting by shifting the focus of ethnographic studies away from the legacy of white folklorists towards the work of Black collectors and by reconstructing the lives of the performers these white folklorists met.

This study is inspired too by scholarship that considers critically the interrelatedness of race and music/sound. These scholars are, among others: Clyde Woods, Daphne A. Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Sonnet Retman, Nicole Brittingham Furlonge, Paul Gilroy, Matthew D. Morrison, Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten. The study builds on this scholarship by using methodologies of diversifying, re-mapping and reading *with* and *against* the limits of the archive(s) to challenge the existing canon. This research into national and institutional collections will focus on their classificatory language and structures. It examines how Black people were inscribed into the archives and the conditions of exchange. By contrasting these archival settings with the content of the recordings or visual representations, the study is committed to identifying the often less visible or unaccounted-for effects of segregation, and the strategies of negotiation and improvisation manifested by the Black performers.

This study points out how certain epistemological positions as well as the research paradigms that were articulated by white collectors of African American folk have

contributed to ongoing structures of anti-Blackness that shaped the national, social, political, economic and cultural landscape in the United States. These structures and the legacy of these practices are as relevant as ever. In a recent text, Robin. D. G. Kelley rejected the association of ‘looting’ with Black people and instead framed white people as the progenitors of such a practice: ‘Our country was built on looting – the looting of indigenous lands and African labor. African-Americans, have much more experience being looted than looting [...] Our bodies were loot. The forced extraction of our labor was loot.’ (Kelley ‘What Kind of Society’). Therefore, the urgency implied in Kelley’s call to dissect and upend white imperial practices resonates with the framework of my research, whereby the musical expression and the labour of these collectors and performers were also to an extent *looted*.

\*

### **Side B**

‘The publication of *Slave Songs of the United States* in 1867 was in its way, something like our first orbital lunar flight. It was not the end but a beginning that helped to set a course from which, thereafter, there would be no turning back.’ With these words, Harrold Courlander opened the preface of the Dover Edition of *Slave Songs* that was published more than a century later in 1995. Courlander (1908-1996) who specialised in African, Caribbean and African American culture, could not have been more right in his description of the critical role this nineteenth-century publication played, but not in the way he meant. *Slave Songs* consists of 136 songs organised by different locales (the South-Eastern Slave States, Northern Seaboard Slave States, Inland Slave States, and the Gulf States), collected from various sources and people, and edited by William Francis Allen, Lucy McKim Garrison and Charles Pickard Ware, who contributed the larger portion of the songs. It was the first comprehensive attempt to organise into one format so many written accounts from various locales.

On the one hand, the analogy Courlander used is very reflective of the pioneer/frontier ideology that shaped white collectors' entry to the field, wishing to discover unexplored territories and unearth new (which were emblems of old) musical expressions. However, this analogy is inherently wrong as it undermines the preconditions that enabled such a forceful entry, whereby the racial order enabled white collectors, even in new and unfamiliar territories, to act as if they owned the place. This anthology is also oblivious to how the conditions of Black music in North America were formed under subjugation to and in proximity to white people. Therefore, to suggest that it was unfamiliar territory is misleading, to say the least. Western society had been using African and African American musical expressions under conditions of bondage as a way of '[preserving] the human cargo' aboard the slave ship during the transatlantic voyage (Thompson 8) as a means to prove the alleged inferiority of Black people (Radano 129) and as a way to justify and assert domination. As Frederick Douglass noted, the enslaved people 'were expected to sing as well as to work. A silent slave was not liked, either by masters or overseers.' (61). Music was also a means of surveillance whereby 'the overseer knows where they [enslaved people] were, and that they were moving on with the work', Douglass stated (61).

Furthermore, Courlander argued in his preface to the anthology as having a positive impact on the field, noting that 'every serious writing on what we now call African-American traditional music' included it in its bibliography. The contention of this dissertation is to point out the formation of a privileged group that boarded that metaphorical lunar flight and never got off; it does so by tracing the practices they carried which were reproduced in altered forms throughout time but never dismantled – thus emphasising the effect of 'no turning back' (Courlander Preface). The agreed-upon association of white collectors as a group that became experts in, or specialised in, culture(s) of those who were historically disempowered (and mostly denied the opportunities of inhabiting such positions) afforded them access and

accolades. This process, as asserted, was at the expense of the exclusion of African American performers and collectors, a process that this dissertation is committed not only to challenging but to overturning.

The field of folk songs collecting, as reflected in this 1867 anthology and its many successors, suffers from the same problems that Toni Morrison identified in the field of literature. In *Playing in the Dark*, she confronts how literary historians and critics circulated ‘knowledge’ and saw the American literary canon as ‘free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first Africans and then African Americans in the United States’ (4). Similarly, even within the field dedicated to the study of African American music, African Americans have gained a secondary place. Therefore, this dissertation confronts the harmful effects of this practice in the first chapter about Pickens Tartt and through the African American collectors and performers whose participation in this field has been actively minimised by Courlander’s triumphant statements.

This practice was expanded in the twentieth-century. An example of the trend is visible in the text that appeared on the back of original cover of the first edition in 1934 of John and Alan Lomax’s *American Ballads and Folk Songs*:

With this ample collection of authentic ballads and songs, you can immerse yourself in the rich tradition and heritage of American folk music. Discover the diversity, spontaneity, free-flowing melody, and sheer invention of scores of songs sung by cowboys and convicts, lumberjacks, hobos, miners, plantation slaves, mountaineers, soldiers, and many others.

This tendency was heightened during the New Deal era, a period marked by racial segregation and federally-supported initiatives and programmes such as Work Progress Administration (WPA), Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), Farm Security Administration (FSA) which were comprised of collectors of folk songs, photographers and writers. These agents were sent out with instructions to provide representation of folk life. Such a pursuit and its associated practice of collecting and documenting African American folklore was performed with the

intent of preserving untouched expressions from a foreseeable future of extinction due to changes brought by technological advancement such as the phonograph and radio. As John Blacking argues in his essay 'Problems of Theory and Method in the Study of Musical Change':

The studies of "folk" music have invariably been concerned with musical change, but have attended to musical products more than musical processes. Even if they have not been motivated by the explicit aim to record music that is disappearing or being "contaminated", they implicitly invoke the notion of historically ancient, pre-industrial or pre-urban musical tradition. (7)

This is reflected regularly in the early work of Lomax who saw the cultural expression produced during slavery as the epitomisation of authenticity. Shortly after Lomax had joined his father for their 1933 recording trip, the two had speculated that the closest thing would be found within the walls of a prison. Lomax explained that they had decided to visit prison farms in the South because there they would find 'that the Negro, away from the pressure of the churchly community, ignorant of the uplifting educational movement, having none but official contact with white men, dependent on the resources of his own group for amusement, and hearing no canned music, would have preserved and increased his heritage of secular folk-music' (Lomax & Cohen 22). During the New Deal period, these collectors who were often outsiders to these communities and in positions of power (race, class and gender) (re)conceptualised and monetised the songs that were extracted from the communities who performed them. This introduction maps out the different aspects and patterns of white collecting practices that this nineteenth-century anthology established. Each section will commence with the anthology and spread into further examples from the twentieth century to point out the continuance of these patterns.

In *Ring Shout, Wheel About*, Katrina Dyonne Thompson stresses that 'the history of black people in entertainment, or more specifically black people as entertainment, contributed significantly to the construction of race and identity for African Americans' (5). Building on

Thompson's argument, it is useful to consider how the history she depicts contributed equally to the construction (and maintenance) of white identity and notions of white supremacy and avoids the 'collective American silence' about the meaning of whiteness, as Grace Elizabeth Hale calls it (xi). This avoidance serves the association of whiteness with being an American. Thus, following Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' the enterprise of collecting, cataloguing and publishing African American songs/music was as much about the preservation of these white collectors' individual and national identities in the wake of the Civil War, Reconstruction Era and the emancipation of the enslaved, as it was about the preservation of the songs they collected. This process is evident in the editors' and contributors' tendency to look the other way from the atrocities of slavery, as well as in their investment in the portrayal of an ontological Blackness marked by semi-savagery and intellectual inferiority. The three editors of this anthology were associated with the abolitionist movement. However, being abolitionists and supporting the abolition of slavery did not mean that they fully supported or sought ways to achieve full equality among Black and white people. As Christopher Castiglia argues, by 'imagining African American interiority as comprised of (the desire for) civic abstraction' white abolitionists saw and positioned 'black Americans as static emblems of a national "character" that sympathetic affect entitled white abolitionist to challenge and change' (34). In other words, some white abolitionists often constructed a mechanism and a set of justifications that would transfer the control of Black subjects to white frameworks of knowledge. Their professional work in different domains (education, religion and several academic disciplines) often contributed to the construction of new barriers to racial equality, as John Stauffer suggests (4). By reconfiguring Blackness not as skin colour but as a 'suffering interior', Castiglia further stresses, white reformers 'claimed a public authority that differentiated them from other whites [...]' (35). These collectors' attitudes toward African Americans resonated well with



George M. Fredrickson's concept of 'romantic racialism' (107). He argues that the reproduction of benign views that depict African Americans as 'gentle, forgiving, and kind', demarcated by 'black peculiarities', served to soothe white anxieties about Black people freed en-masse (169,101). However, this 'romantic racialism', as Fredrickson calls it, had tragic consequences that have contributed to the 'persistence of racist doctrines' (127). After the emancipation of the enslaved, abolitionists failed 'to ground their case for the black man on a forthright and intellectually convincing argument for the basic identity in the moral and intellectual aptitude of all races [...]' (127). Building on that, I suggest that this anthology reveals abolitionists' investment in portraying the African Americans (enslaved and emancipated) as peculiar, inferior and representative of backwardness. These characteristics served these collectors' process of self-identification without undermining their moral virtue as abolitionists.

These traits of self-identification and romantic racialism were still prevalent among collectors in the twentieth-century. Their writings reveal the mechanism of justification for their ventures and roles that evolved around their notions of self and identity. Alan Lomax, who became known as 'the man who recorded the world' (Szwed), is a perfect example of this position. In the first chapter of his 1993 memoir *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Lomax looked back to his first decade as a collector. He attributes his motivation to collect to 'an impulsive and romantic streak in my nature that I find difficult to resist' (3). This is exemplified in his depiction of the state of Mississippi, which he had visited frequently since the early 1930s. For Lomax, Mississippi was an emblem of the American South. Mississippi, he wrote, signifies 'fried catfish, roasting ears dipped in butter, and watermelon in the cool of the evening, washed down with corn liquor and accompanied by the blues' (3). To Lomax, the African American way of life consisted of served food, liquor and music – which were consumed in equal measure. Lomax saw himself as a true southerner despite living the majority of his life (since his late

teens) in the north. Regardless, when he arrived on the streets of Memphis, he describes himself reaching ‘the front gate to home’ and walking through them as if he ‘owned the place’ (4). In this sense, Lomax claims the American South as his spiritual home. Lomax believed that his knowledge and familiarity with the place and the role it played in Black music’s history, conferred upon him a sense of ownership and a stake in the local tradition. He entered the Monarch saloon ‘where Handy and Jelly Roll had played, slipped a quarter into the jukebox’ and called for beer, a request which was refused by the bartender who pointed to a sign saying ‘This is a colored place, no white served. Sorry’ (4). The bartender explained to him in an unapologetic manner, accompanied with a grin, that ‘if we gonna segredate one way, we gonna segredate the other [sic]’ (4). Moreover, upon finding the whole street inaccessible and unaccommodating, ‘glancing into the dance halls and bars where the fun was going on’, he audaciously wrote that he ‘learned what it was like to be a black man in the wrong part of town’ (4).

As Allen stated in the introduction to the 1867 anthology, the aim was to collect and publish songs that were ‘*relics* of a state of society which has passed away’ [emphasis added] (iii). This explicit agenda should be read for what it is – the expression of a cultural hegemony built on patterns of white consumption of Black music. The ‘folk’, or in this case the enslaved and the formerly enslaved from whom these songs have been collected, were considered as providers of goods to be consumed by the dominant white class. This system becomes evident in the long list of acknowledgements which identified many white people who contributed songs they had collected or reflected upon, but neglected to name the people whose songs were collected.

Similarly, Lomax replicated this imagined community made up of the network of white collectors who rarely acknowledged the massive interest shown in folk music and collecting by African American collectors across the country. As Charles Joyner shows, Lomax acknowledged the contribution of local collectors who aided his work, such as Ruby

Pickens Tartt and Genevieve Willcox Chandler, describing them as ‘two intelligent and creative Southern women’ who ‘explored the singing resources of their communities and welcomed us with our recording machine’ (15). Joyner highlights how Lomax was ‘less generous in crediting the work of such African American scholars as the musicologist John W. Work, the sociologist Lewis Wade Jones, and their graduate assistant Samuel Jr., whose field project in the Mississippi Delta he joined and took control over’ (15).

In his article about the Lomaxes and the construction of an ‘American Past’, Benjamin Filene distinguishes, perhaps for the first time, between preservation and how the Lomaxes’ actual work during the 1930s could be considered. He challenges, even undermines, the common understanding of their work; while they might have been treated as ‘preservationists who reclaimed an endangered folk-song heritage’, he claims that in fact ‘they were creators as much as caretakers of a tradition’ (604). Filene places their work within a wider moment in which the construction of a ‘canon’ was underway in practically every field; canonising always carries with it the processes of interpretation, inclusion and exclusion.

Reflecting its explicit aim ‘to collect and preserve these melodies’, the 1867 anthology has rendered these songs as tangible artefacts – ‘specimen’, as Allen wrote (ii). As tangible artefacts, they were encouraged to be extracted, consumed and often appropriated by white people who were also their intended audience, as evident from the instructions given on how to perform these songs (i). This process was made possible by regarding the enslaved and the formerly enslaved as a generalised social group which was marked as inferior through the use of demeaning stereotypes such as ‘half barbarous’ and ‘semi savaged’ people, while their voices and songs were depicted as having a ‘peculiar quality’ (ii, iv, v). Many pages of the anthology’s introduction are dedicated to what Allen referred to as the peculiarities of language, speech and dialect, which in some places and cases were unintelligible. Allen claimed that ‘a stranger, upon first hearing these people talk, especially if there is a group of

them in animated conversation, can hardly understand them better if they spoke a different language [...]’ (xxiv). It does not occur to Allen that such a stranger may be an invader and that the animated conversation may be part of an attempt by members of the group to shield themselves from the unwelcome guest. In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka discusses this obsession of white scholars with the ‘unintelligible’, claiming that this trope reflects much more about them than about the singers: ‘a few of the “unintelligible” songs are not as unintelligible as their would-be interpreters would have it’ (22). Baraka stresses how this trope had served these interpreters’ assumptions and frameworks. Similarly, other parts of this anthology were used to establish the level of illiteracy and backwardness among African Americans to support the perception of their status as inferior, dependent and needing guidance. As Ibram X. Kendi notes in *Stamped from the Beginning*, marking Black people as inferior denies and erases the fact that the enslaved were ‘highly intelligent blacksmiths, shoemakers, bricklayers, coopers, carpenters, engineers, manufacturers, artisans, musicians, farmers, midwives, physicians, overseers, house managers, cooks, and bi- and triangular translators’ (132). The musicologist and collector Henry E. Krehbiel, like Courlander, praised this anthology, claiming that it made up ‘the entire sum of what it is essential to know about the social, literary and psychological side of the folksongs of the American negroes’ (xiii). However, what Krehbiel sees as essential was to emerge as deficient. The deference, the inadequate care and attention given to the context and even the words uttered by the invisible people who made this anthology possible, amount to the largest neglect. Moreover, by defining ‘racialized bodies as animalistic, natural or non-human’, as Shana Almeida suggests, these collectors denied these men and women ‘their subjectivity and perpetuate[d] dominance’ (82). Some of the music they heard was marked as ‘civilized’, a sign of its proximity to whiteness. The collectors often explained that these types of songs were

‘composed under the influence or association with whites’ or were the result of hearing ‘their masters sing or play’ (Allen i).

This anthology thus cemented in print the epistemological stances as well as the research paradigm that shaped white collecting practices of African American folk songs in the United States. This publication is also emblematic of what Almeida calls ‘race-based epistemologies’ (81). She discusses the process in which hegemony and colonialism ‘(re)produce “legitimate” knowledge and knowers’. At the same time, she argues they were strategically positioning the ‘subaltern body’ as ‘socially, politically and racially marginalized so that they can never express their ways of knowing and reasoning without being “Othered”, oppressed and repressed, across time and space’ (81). As much as this anthology marked its knowers – these white collectors and the many subsequent generations whose mere status afforded them access and dominance – it also marked the subalterns. These were the performers from whom they collected, but also the African American collectors that this dissertation examines.

This tendency and practice continued at the turn of the century. As Marybeth Hamilton shows in *In Search of the Blues*, white men and women ‘set out in search of black voices, they heard as uncorrupted and pure’ (9). These white men and women came from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines that included literature, sociology, anthropology, journalism, ethnography and musicology, or were driven by mere curiosity. The commonality between them, Hamilton claims, was that they ‘were captivated by the idea of (in John Lomax’s term) “uncontaminated” Black singing’ and that they all ‘embarked on quests to unearth it’ (10).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> This dissertation, however, is less interested in the impact of the technological inventions, of which there are many, but instead discusses them as another format in which to collect artifacts and remove them from the communities of their makers.

Collectors' engrossment in the aspects mentioned above was sustained as they literally turned themselves hard of hearing in respect of the meaning of the collected music. They often sought examples to sustain their assumptions and did not express much care for the context, circumstances and the nature of those examples. In his unrelenting attempts to show how certain words were corrupted, Allen took the example of the word *stan*' and presented it as a common word whose meaning, he noted, was 'look [like]'. Allen cited the following example without attributing it to a specific person or supplementing it with any context: "My back stan' like white man" was a boast which meant that it was not scarred with lash' (xxvii). What I consider to be a testimonial aspect and an utterance was completely overlooked.

This deliberately impaired hearing encapsulates the entwined relationship which Fred Moten suggests exists between Blackness and Anti-Blackness.<sup>7</sup> The attempt of these collectors to define Blackness reveals their Anti-Blackness attitudes and their indifference to Black experience including when it is clearly uttered to them. Equally, they have partially ignored calls for freedom. Several of the songs that appear in this anthology were collected during the Civil War, such as those collected by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Booker T. Washington suggested that 'most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. [...]. During the war the enslaved 'gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the 'freedom' in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.' (Washington *Up from Slavery* 19-20). These utterances highlighted by Washington are somewhat missing from the interpretation or footnotes that accompany these songs.

Maya Jasanoff argues that by accumulating material such as objects, property or songs, the collector was 'able to transform himself, in his own eyes at least, into a cosmopolitan gentleman-connoisseur' (110). This accumulation served the centralised positions these collectors achieved as they 'took an active interest in exploring, and

---

<sup>7</sup> Moten writes that any consideration of Anti Blackness must be concerned with 'how blackness bears what [Saidiya] Hartman calls the "diffusion" of the terror of anti-blackness' (*Black and Blur* viii).

promoting, themselves' (111). Such exploration and promotion was done on the back of anonymous, marginalised and interchangeable individuals and communities, and resulted in enhanced cultural and professional status and opportunities. Lawrence Gellert (1898-1979), whose archives consist of hundreds of aluminium and acetate sound recordings of more than 500 songs he collected from the 1920s to 1940s, is a good example. As Steven Garabedian shows, Gellert had found a new and exciting path to build his material and cultural capital, largely through the publication of *Negro Songs of Protest* in 1936 and the publication in socialist newspapers and journals of songs he had collected in the South. Gellert was profiled in *Time* magazine that year for his skill 'in collecting Negro songs that few white men have ever heard' (Garabedian 180). *The Daily Worker* wrote that Gellert's publication was a 'landmark in American Culture' and the composer Lan Adomian wrote for the *New Masses* that these songs were 'indictment' against white ignorance and denial (180). Gellert's collection was to Bruce Bastin 'an alternative source' (Garabedian 181) to the canon housed in the Archive of American Folk-Song at the Library of Congress. Even within the critical appreciation of the political agency found in these songs, neither Gellert nor these critics were concerned with the identity of the performers or their lived experience.

The process of extraction and appropriation from those who were excluded by this imagined community of white collectors was described in cultural terms. For example, in the introduction to the anthology, Allen noted that some songs such as 'Roll, Jordan, Roll', 'Praise, Member', 'Wrestle On, Jacob' and 'The Lonesome Valley' were already 'established favorites among the whites [...]' (ii). The availability of these songs to white folklorists and audiences was widely accepted. For example, the British actress and poet Fanny Kemble noted in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* that hearing these songs made her 'wish that some great musical composer could hear these semi-savage performances' (Allen v). She indicated how a 'little skillful adaptation and instrumentation'

of one or two ‘barbaric chants and choruses’ would make ‘the fortune of an opera’ (Allen v). These songs, in Kemble’s eyes or ears, can reach their superior potential only when fully adopted and adapted by a skilful (white) composer. It is revealing that even the most exploitative genre of the minstrel show, which Allen defined as a ‘spurious imitations, manufactured to suit the somewhat sentimental taste of our community’, is considered by him as a ‘tribute to the musical genius of the race’ (i). This process of ‘borrowing’ Black culture for white consumption that Allen deemed as tribute was, as Eric Lott points out, ‘depend[ent] on the material relations of slavery’ – a fact Allen chose to ignore (3). Frederick Douglass described blackface actors as ‘the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from [African Americans] a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their fellow white citizens’ (Douglass ‘The Hutchinson Family’). Lott further argues that the minstrel shows ‘obscured these relations by pretending that slavery was amusing, right, and natural’ (3). Later on, the Black Canadian-American composer R. Nathaniel Dett argued further about the long term damage the minstrels caused to Black music repertoire and performance. He addressed the resentment and dislike of spirituals felt by some African Americans (the formerly enslaved and their descendants), writing that ‘White minstrels with black faces have done more than any other single agency to lower the tone of Negro music and cause the Negro to despise his own songs’ (‘Emancipation of Negro Music’ 172).

These collectors did not articulate such explicit ideas about slavery, but by avoiding the discussion of slavery in this anthology and detaching the lived experience and the impact of slavery from the songs, they cast the songs produced under these conditions as products of entertainment. Lott argues that blackface performance was ‘the first formal public acknowledgment by whites of black culture’ (4) and many other scholars contended that they were the ‘first American entertainment genre’ based on cultural appropriation (Thompson 5).



Katrina Dyonne Thompson and Saidiya Hartman have both written about the historically coercive and exploitative entanglement of Black entertainment and labour as a phenomenon that originated with the transatlantic slave trade and became entrenched within the institution of slavery. Thompson challenges the accepted belief about minstrels and entertainment, and points out that the patterns identified by these scholars existed in the slave society and as such it formed the ‘first entertainment venue’ (5). Thompson further points out how ‘scenes of enslaved blacks performing music, song, and dance for the amusement of white spectators represented the first major American entertainment setting, long before the minstrel shows appear’ (5). She writes that the music of the enslaved people who worked the fields in the Southern States provided the ‘scene’s score’ (5). The pain and hardship of forced physical labour is completely discarded as the focus has shifted to the ‘entertaining’ aspect of ‘slave songs’. White spectators look only towards their own needs: taking amusement from the pain of the enslaved. Her depiction reinforces the ways in which these collectors treated these songs.

The songs sung by the enslaved people illustrated their ‘feelings, opinions and habits’, as Allen noted (xii). However, by treating these performers as interchangeable and part of a cohesive group – the ‘racialized Other’, as Almeida suggests – the specificity of the performers’ feelings, opinions, concerns and habits were generalised and removed from their historical context. Slave songs, as this nineteenth-century publication demonstrates, were turned into a genre, style or type of music; the performers’ identities and lived experience were constantly beside the point. Moreover, as Almeida asserts, the denial of ‘black existence’ is never an individual matter: a Black individual, she writes, ‘does not exist because blacks as a group do not exist’ (82). Similarly, in *Slave Songs*, only a few people were mentioned and only with their forenames – Molsy, Bristol, Billy, Quash, Rose, Venus, Gib, etc – which further contributes to and reflects the erasure of their identity. When they

were actually namechecked, it was done in a careless way that served only to intensify the sense that their roles were interchangeable in the minds of these collectors (xii). Hamilton asserts that folk music ‘was composed anonymously, transmitted orally, and suffused with the spirit of peasantry’ (13). Yet, these familiar assertions are not entirely precise. We can learn from the African American collectors examined in this dissertation, and sometimes even from white collectors, how certain songs, melodies and lyrics were composed by individuals as well as by whole groups such as church congregations, group of workers, etc. They were only rendered anonymous by the publications; composers were erased and rendered non-existent. The refusal to abide by Western capitalist standards of ownership and authorship and the collective practice of sharing and exchange that was performed by generations of African Americans is another matter, which will be discussed throughout the dissertation. Many of the songs that this dissertation focuses on were integral to the makers of the songs and were inseparable from traditions of storytelling that reveal the rich textures of lives. The historical conditions of white consumption of Black music and entertainment that preceded this anthology, as well as the work of subsequent generations of collectors, made Hamilton’s claim possible.

Tricia Rose describes the way white society has extracted African-American cultural expressions, whether it is the music, the lyrics or the artist, as a means to fetishise the culture. She discusses how through extraction ‘all of what the meanings are about become universalized without the value and the significance of the particular’ (Rose). Furthermore, she adds, ‘when we extract – we decontextualize and all of these histories falls away’ (Rose). This entwined configuration and fabrication of Blackness and sound echoes Matthew D. Morrison's ‘race-based epistemology’ of ‘Blacksound’. Blacksound, he writes, informs the way we understand ‘the making, economics, and racialization of popular music, racialized identity, intellectual property relations and culture at large’ (782). Furthermore, it places the

construction, performance and the material race relations at the centre of the musicological analysis. Similarly, while not a musicological inquiry, this dissertation seeks to do the same to the study of collecting African American folk music from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth-century. This dissertation rejects the premises that were foregrounded in the anthology and refuses to follow in their path. Instead, mindful of how the canon was shaped and had its premises posed as the terms under which this music should be heard, collected and studied, the dissertation follows those people who questioned and opposed those very terms. Against the intellectual property relations shaped by the collecting practices that reproduced racialised identities, *Reclaiming the Lore* seeks to listen to the way those Black singers, musicians and collectors voiced themselves and aims to restore the tradition of folk songs that was appropriated by white collectors.

## Chapter I :‘At Homeness’: Proximity and Exploitation in Ruby Pickens Tartt’s

### Collecting Practice

It was the reputation of the folk song collector Ruby Pickens Tartt (1880-1974) that first caught my attention. She was a folklorist and a writer and also considered to be a gifted, albeit amateur painter. The quality of her collection was acclaimed for its local nature and for the close relationship she had with the African American community around her hometown of Livingston, Alabama. She was celebrated by her contemporaries such as B.A. Botkin, Harold Courlander, Carl Carmer, Alan and John Lomax, and also by scholars in later publications (1980s and 1990s), for these characteristics.<sup>8</sup> I was hoping to learn that Pickens Tartt’s practice differed from that of the white men who dominated this field. It did in some ways, especially with the oral history she collected for the Work Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s and early 1940s, discussed towards the end of this chapter. However, in studying this presumed intimacy between Pickens Tartt and the African American community, this chapter reveals the inadequacy of the idiom ‘intimacy with’ to describe her relationship with African American singers. Replacing the word intimacy with one denoting a more spatial connection allows us to see the way that this *proximity* to Black musicians – and the access to their labour which it facilitated – echoes the scheme of relations common to the plantation system and embodies its legacy. While violence was rampant in the Jim Crow South, Pickens Tartt did not need to replicate the abuse committed by white enslavers that Thompson portrays in *Ring Shout Wheel About*, by making Black people sing for her

---

<sup>8</sup> Carmer used materials he was introduced to by Pickens Tartt during his visit to Livingston in his *Stars Fell on Alabama* where Pickens Tartt was fictionalised as ‘Mary Louise’; his recollection from his stay and his impression from Pickens Tartt can be found in Carl Carmer, *Miss Ruby, My Most Unforgettable Character*, Livingston, Alabama: Livingston University Press, 1975, p. 3. Like Carmer, Harold Courlander also fictionalised Pickens Tartt in *The Big Old World of Richard Creeks* as Miss Judy. Botkin used materials she had collected while working for the WPA in his 1945 anthology *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*.

entertainment as well as for her white guests.<sup>9</sup> The social and economic conditions experienced by the rural African Americans of Sumter county were shaped during slavery and maintained by the racial capitalist system of sharecropping, debt peonage and the denial of opportunities forced by segregation. Pickens Tartt used her position and proximity to these African American singers, who were often her employees or recipients of financial contributions, to make such requests with a smile and with kindness. Under the mantle of intimacy, her conduct was perceived by her peers as well as by future generations of scholars as a marker of her excellent character because she ‘moved beyond’ the racial order, as Virginia Pounds Brown and Laurella Owens wrote in their biography of Pickens Tartt *Toting the Lead Row* (14). In continuity with the persona of the plantation mistress depicted in Thompson’s account who was ‘profoundly fond of music’ (70), this chapter studies Pickens Tartt’s use of these performances which took place in her back yard to confirm and enhance her status in the community while providing her with entertainment in her daily life.

‘We can have the Negroes sing out here, because I believe they’ll do a better work where they feel at home’ (Brown 151)<sup>10</sup> was what Pickens Tartt wrote to her guests – the celebrated collector John A. Lomax and his wife, Ruby Terrill Lomax, before their fourth visit to Livingston to record songs for the Library of Congress in 1941.<sup>11</sup> By referring to the musicians in this way as an unidentified group of Black people, Pickens Tartt asserted her

---

<sup>9</sup> In the third chapter of her book *Onstage* Thompson provides many accounts of the verbal and physical abuse used by the white enslaver class to force the enslaved to dance and sing. They have done so, she explains, to establish their ‘status in the planter world’ and to ‘publicly assert and legitimize [their] power’ and display their wealth (69-70).

<sup>10</sup> Taken from a letter Pickens Tartt wrote to John and Terrill Lomax before their upcoming visit and recordings expedition to the South (Brown 151).

<sup>11</sup> Since 1932, Lomax had a ten-year arrangement with the Archive of American Folk Song (AAFS) by which he could use the library recording equipment and recording blanks, and in return he waived his fee and had to deposit all of the recordings in the library. By the time these recording sessions took place he was also Honorary Consultant and Curator of the AAFS (a position he held from 1934 until he died in 1948). According to the AAFS 1939 Annual Report 1, 103 field recordings and commercial recordings of folk songs had been accessioned alongside field notes, photographs and films produced by Lomax and other individuals working for various federal initiatives such as FSA, FWP and the Music Project of the WPA that were active at the time. During the 1939 Southern States recording trip, John and Ruby Lomax travelled 6,502 miles over a period of three months. They recorded nearly 700 sound recordings from more than 300 performers.

status and her power. Leronne Bennett Jr. argues that names ‘are the essence of the game of power and control’ (400). Thus, when Pickens Tartt addressed her white guests, she made a clear distinction regarding their shared (ostensibly superior) status, which has significance only in opposition to a different group viewed as lesser and inferior. Pickens Tartt did not bother to mention the performers’ names when she wrote to Lomax, considering these details redundant; she indicated a space to be filled by any Black group of people. In another letter she sent to Lomax and Terrill, thanking them for the Christmas gifts they had sent, she wrote ‘Negroes were thrilled with Xmas gifts’ (Brown 155). In addition to these implicit denials of identity, Pickens Tartt did not relate or refer to the Black people she knew as performers, musicians and singers – terms which would be better suited to the context of the conversation which was about recording their music – and thus denies them their cultural and creative output. In her writing, Pickens Tartt described folk singers as ‘artists in their field’ (RPT\_Box3\_F1\_0012). Such a double denial, manifested in her letter to Lomax, reveals the paradox embedded in the practice of many white collectors who recognised the value of the cultural contribution of African Americans and aimed to document it, but actively hindered their individual and professional identities. Thus, the quotation ‘We can have the Negroes sing out here, because I believe they’ll do a better work where they feel at home’ epitomises the racial dynamics and power relations embedded in Pickens Tartt’s practice as a collector.

These dynamics and relations were inseparable from her position as a white, Southern, upper-class woman. This status encapsulates the main themes to be explored in this chapter: home, exploitation, intimacy/proximity and their historical entanglement. The chapter situates Pickens Tartt’s domestic space as a site that enables proximity and oppression. It focuses on her sense of ‘home’ – physical, inherited and imagined – to interrogate aspects of race and class, in what I call ‘at-homeness’. Through these themes, this chapter reveals the nuances of oppression within the national and Southern identity defined by racial segregation and notion

of superiority, and traces how they were replicated in both personal and national archives related to Pickens Tartt. In developing this notion of ‘at-homeness’ to describe Pickens Tartt’s practice, I am inspired by bell hooks’s concept of ‘homeplace’ which I employ to probe issues of representation and self-fashioning through photographs, songs and oral history from various archives, mainly from the Pickens Tartt Collection at UWA and the Lomax Collection at the LoC.

Pickens Tartt was known for collecting African American songs and oral history, within a 15-mile radius of her home, from the time of her youth until well into her fifties. Even though her archive is digitised, and much of her work and biographical accounts are available in print, I knew I had to visit Livingston, Alabama, where Pickens Tartt grew up and lived most of her life, and where her collection is kept.<sup>12</sup> In 1835, Livingston was established on the stolen land of the Choctaw Indians. Like many small towns in the rural South, it did not change its appearance much over the years.<sup>13</sup> When I visited in August 2019, the residues of its history were visible at every turn I made. As Ta-Nehisi Coates proclaimed in his opening testimony to the House Hearing on Reparations in June 2019, slavery and then Jim Crow ‘was a hundred and fifty years ago, and it was right now’(Coates). The blueprint laid out during slavery and Jim Crow is not only a thing of the past; its impact is the fact of its presence in Livingston. Alabama is currently the fifth poorest state in the United States. In 2018, 30.1% of African Americans in the state were living in poverty – a higher proportion than the national level (26.2%) and a significantly higher rate than for the state’s white

---

<sup>12</sup> Ruby Pickens Tartt’s Collection is kept at the Julia Tutwiler Library at the University of West Alabama (UWA), Livingston, Alabama. Her collection, which comprises more than 5000 items, was donated to Livingston University following her death in 1974.

<sup>13</sup> For information on the Choctaw Indians in the area and the theft from and expulsion of its people, see Jacqueline Anderson Matte, "Extinction by Reclassification: The MOWA Choctaws of South Alabama and Their Struggle for Federal Recognition." *Alabama Review* 59, no. 3 (2006): 163-204; Samuel J. Wells and Roseanna Tubby *After Removal: The Choctaw in Mississippi* (2010) and James T. Carson *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (1999).

population (13.6%) (Alabama Possible).<sup>14</sup> In Livingston in 2018, 42.3% (1130 people) were living below the poverty line; 70% of these are African Americans (Data USA). Incarceration rates in Alabama are not only the highest in the United States but the highest in the world; African Americans make up the largest numbers in prison, and Hispanic people are the second-largest group. This blueprint and its vicious cycle impacts on poverty rates, family lives, employment and enfranchisement. As Michelle Alexander argues in *The New Jim Crow*, ‘We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.’ (2). In front of the UWA campus stands the antebellum mansion Lakewood (constructed in 1840) which housed the Southern reformist and educator Julia S. Tutwiler (1841-1916) who taught Pickens Tartt. The Tutwiler family owned more than 40 enslaved people, priding themselves on providing them with education. (Synnott) A modest plaque is situated in a hidden spot to the rear of one of the campus’s buildings. It honours Liza James Howard – the first African American student who attended and graduated from the university in 1969. While the campus population has diversified since then (today, 44.7% are white students; 41.3% are African Americans), the faculty is more than 70% white (College Factual). The first integrated school in the county opened in Livingston a year before my visit in 2018, decades after the Brown vs. Board ruling to desegregate public schools, a fact that is revealing of the attitudes of local white residents who since the late 1960s have been pulling their children out of public schools and opening what have been and still are known as ‘Segregation Academies’(Olmstead).

During the ten days of my visit, the town was eerie and quiet. The student population of the town, which adds more than 2000 people to its 4000 residents, had not yet returned from their summer vacation. The town centre felt abandoned and most shops were closed. In the 1830s, the Sumter County Courthouse was constructed at the centre of the main square. It was replaced in 1902 by the current Beaux-Arts structure, a bored well whose water gained

---

<sup>14</sup> Data relate to 2018, to establish the context of my visit. Due to Covid-19, the numbers have changed significantly.



Livingston a reputation as a spa town in the nineteenth-century, and a cannon used during the Civil War alongside a confederate monument erected in 1908 by the Sumter Chapter United Daughters of the Confederacy. In a diagonal line from this monument stands a memorial to Adele ‘Vera’ Hall (1902-1964) built in 2007, two years after she was inducted into the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame. Hall’s memorial is square in shape and made of stone bricks affixed with a bronze plaque on which Hall’s face is engraved. It was nearly the only African American presence visible in the centre of the town which according to the census has a majority African American population.

Born in Paynesville, a small locale just outside Livingston, Hall has been justly celebrated as a gifted singer who ‘establish[ed] one of the most stunning bodies of folk music on record’, as the memorial plaque notes. The inscription, however, is disproportionately focused on the story of Hall’s discovery and rediscovery by several well-known folklorists and musicians, all of whom were white: Pickens Tartt ‘Alabama folklorist’ introduced Hall to ‘famed ethnomusicologist’ John Avery Lomax, who visited and recorded songs in Livingston for the Library of Congress (LoC) between 1937-1941. The subsequent list names Alan Lomax, Byron Arnold and Harold Courlander as well as the American musician Moby who in 1999 sampled Hall’s voice and her renditions to the song ‘Trouble So Hard’ for his hugely successful album *Play* alongside two other songs performed by African American singers he had heard on Alan Lomax’s CD box set *Sounds of the South*. David Hesmondhalgh has challenged Moby’s practice of sampling from other cultures, notably African Americans, in his essay ‘Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality’ writing that the samples ‘pay tribute to that other culture, even celebrate it, but on terms which ultimately reduce the complexity of the appropriated culture to something crude and simplistic’ (63). Ryan Diduck, more bluntly, called it ‘whitewashing the blues’ (Diduck). Demonstrating this process which puts white collectors in the focal position, in the liner notes to his album, Moby extended his thanks ‘to

the Lomaxes and all the archivists and music historians whose field recordings made this record possible'. The liner notes further describe the song 'Trouble So Hard' as representative 'of the old and simple type of Negro spiritual' and notes that Hall sang in her kitchen 'performing both lead and chorus and brooding about the tragedy of life and turning to her lord for comfort'(Moby). This statement is essentialising Blackness through sound, but also averting through generalisation ('tragedy of life') what is undeniably the result of anti-Blackness structures. Hall's recordings, as the memorial plaque concludes, 'include examples of early blues and folk songs that are found nowhere else. Her masterful renditions of traditional songs and stories are a defining part of Southern Black culture and the Black Belt region'.

Emblematic of the collection of historiography, and of this town, this county, and the landscape of this state, this memorial overshadows and pushes to the margin the actual voices and lived experiences of the African Americans whose heritage and labour comprised the larger cultural and economic share of this place and these collectors' corpora. The plaque does not disclose, for example, how John Lomax 'coaxed' Hall to sing this famous song (Wade 153). It neglects to mention that Hall's grandparents were enslaved people here, or that her father Ephron worked all year round on the farm as well as in other jobs, trying to avoid the 'debt servitude' that commonly threatened African Americans in the rural South (Wade 157). It does not account for the fact that despite the 'national attention' her singing gained, to quote the memorial, she worked all her life as a domestic worker, that she had lost her daughter Minnie Ada and her sister Bessie, and was caring for her ailing mother and her two grandchildren during the time of the recording (Wade 154, 162).<sup>15</sup> It does not account for the

---

<sup>15</sup> Hall's daughter Minnie Ada died from chronic hepatitis leaving two little children behind – John Rogers and Willie Nixon Moore. Hall's sister Bessie was 20 years old when she injured her leg and could not afford the medical costs of seeing a doctor or getting treatment, so her situation worsened and she died within three years of the accident. Wade writes that Bessie's decline, 'borne of medical inattention stemming from poverty and magnified by incessant toil, fits an all-too-typical life in the Black belt of those, Vera said, who had "the same land, the same privilege"' (162).

fact that just before this recording and following a long day of work, Hall had left her own home and family to attend the house of Pickens Tartt where she had cooked dinner and cleaned all the dishes before she sang to John Lomax's recorder (Wade 164).<sup>16</sup> Instead of integrating Hall's own words, like those that were recorded by Alan Lomax in New York during Hall's first and only trip outside of the state in 1948, the memorial reproduces the voice of the knowledgeable. The John Lomax quote on the plaque attests to Hall's 'loveliest untrained voice' and states that her performance was 'graced with dignity and love'. His words reveal his prejudice towards African Americans as lacking these and other qualities by treating Hall as an exception.

How different would that memorial be if it had acknowledged the racism that impacted Hall's life and death?<sup>17</sup> Or if it had included her life story as told by her, noting her resilience and care, portraying her long-standing membership of the Old Shiloh Baptist Church where she loved to sing and was loved for her singing? Or had illuminated the role that music played in Hall's life or in that of her community? Or had emphasised how she had learned most of her songs from her mother Agnes who used to sing while cooking and washing? In the Livingston town centre, there are only these two plaques dedicated to African American figures. There are none dedicated to the history and experience of the African American community that had lived in Livingston for generations. It begs the questions: who and what does a plaque such as the Hall memorial serve?

---

<sup>16</sup> In an undated and untitled document by Pickens Tartt in which she expressed her will to have Hall singing as part of her lecture on folk music, she indicates that Hall worked for her regularly. She writes 'Vera Hall, a former cook of mine' and in parenthesis she adds, as if of secondary importance, '(who has made over 400 records for the library of congress)'. RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0012.

<sup>17</sup> By the time of her 1948 visit to NY, Hall's sight was already impaired as a result of cataracts. She died blind and poor in 1964 and was buried in an unmarked grave in the garden of Morning Star church in Livingston. Her interview with Lomax in 1948 provides much detail about her upbringing and the reality of segregation for Black poor families. See Lomax, Alan, and Alan Lomax. Alan Lomax Collection, Manuscripts, Rainbow Sign. 1959. Manuscript/Mixed Material.

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the history of collecting African American folk song is dominated by the long history of the exploitative connection between entertainment and labour (Thompson; Hartman). This history has its origins in the transatlantic slave trade and was further entrenched with the institution of slavery. Thompson, for example, discusses the transformation of the top deck of the ship into a stage upon which ‘race and gender roles were prescribed and performed’ (Thompson 8). She emphasises the element of coercion and the manifestation of power and dominance within the context of entertainment, whereby Europeans, and later the white enslaver class more broadly, viewed cultural expression as ‘manifestations of Africans’ natural intellectual, moral and social inferiority’ (8). These misrepresentations were essential to the process of instituting chattel slavery. In *Toting the Lead Row*, Brown and Owens noted that Vera Hall and her cousin Richard Doc Reed performed many times at Pickens Tartt’s request, ‘mostly for entertainments she arranged when visitors were present’ (18).

The manifestation of racial superiority and the power to coerce was explicit in John Lomax’s words when he expressed frustration at his failed attempts to record the hollers of another local Black resident in Livingston named Enoch Brown. He told Pickens Tartt, ‘I’ll get that rascal to a microphone even if I have to lasso him’ (Brown & Owens).<sup>18</sup> Pickens Tartt and her father prided themselves for ‘discovering’ Reed at a Sunday afternoon church service when Pickens Tartt was still a child. As Brown and Owens wrote, ‘he was young then, but his voice had sounded out from the group like a trumpet call. He had been one of *her* singers ever since.’ (emphasis added; 18). This narrative telling how Pickens Tartt invited white guests to listen to *her* ‘Negroes’ work and sing echoes how ‘masters often invited guests to the

---

<sup>18</sup> This quote is taken from page 17 of the full manuscript *Toting the Lead Row* that was cut out drastically due to the publisher’s demands. I was granted permission to read and use the full manuscript courtesy of Tina Naremore Jones at her office at UWA, Livingston, Alabama.

plantation to show off their performing slaves' (Thompson 10). The element of ownership was preserved through language.

For Pickens Tartt, racial superiority and the power to coerce were tied to ownership and were closely related to her conception of home and what I call *at-homeness*. Her home and the notion of feeling *at home* were the same thing for her, but it was clear where the threshold stood and who was granted access to which areas, levels and positions. As Lomax wrote in the notes of his 1939 visit, 'all the records that we made in the town of Livingston were made on the spacious back "gallery" or in the flowered -bordered, grassy "lawn"' (*sic*, 235). Therefore 'at-homeness' means that 'they' (Black people) can come 'home' (but outside) as long as they 'sing' i.e., work. The stage was the top deck – outside her home, but within proximity of the house to encourage the Black musicians to 'feel at home'.

### **Racial Etiquette: Obscuring Violence and Coercion**

In 1880, the year Pickens Tartt was born, 28,676 people were living in Sumter County, Alabama, and 20,381 of them were African Americans, according to the US Census. Brown and Owens described how during the Reconstruction Era, the Pickens family and other old families from Livingston 'prided themselves on treating blacks well. Many believed, as their cotton-raising forefathers had, that the black was incapable of looking after himself, that he was indeed the white man's burden' (14). The social status of Pickens Tartt and her family has been described as 'genteel white Livingston' (Brown & Owens 14) and their behaviours as an agreed-upon system of 'social amenities' (14). In *Growing Up Jim Crow*, Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse rejects the convention that assumes these sorts of behaviours were considered the legitimate 'Southern way of life' and wonders 'whether "etiquette" is even an appropriate term' (2). Etiquette by definition, Ritterhouse argues, 'involves at least some coercion' (3). Through the recollections of white and Black children who grew up during the Jim Crow era,

Ritterhouse demonstrates how etiquette or ‘social amenities’ as Brown and Brown calls it were indoctrinated into people regarding every aspect of the day including ‘how individuals stood, ate, drank, walked, talked and even made eye contact with one another’ (3). She claims that etiquette seems so ‘genteel’, yet essentially is the ‘kind of word white southerners themselves might use to obscure the violence and coercion and fear that they used to keep blacks “in their place”’ (2). Brown and Owens explains that these ‘social amenities,’ ‘required the Negro to be respectful to the “white folks”’ (14). Without addressing the element of coercion which Ritterhouse has highlighted, Brown and Owens even claimed without shade of a doubt that ‘blacks outwardly accepted the system’, asking ‘how else were they to survive in a small Black Belt town, if not by the aid of “white folks?”’ (14). In Brown and Owens’ account of segregation, Pickens Tartt and her ilk were framed as white saviours rather than as complicit in the system. The authors provided further explanation of how it worked: ‘they expected him to step aside and let them pass, to tip his hat, to say “Marsa” and “Little Miss” and “Ole Miss”’. On the other hand, African Americans were usually addressed by their first names. White people made concessions to age seniority by calling older Black people “Uncle Joe” or “Aunt Harriet” (Brown & Owens 13).<sup>19</sup>

In *White Southerners*, Lewis M. Killian claimed that after 1865 ‘the hegemony of the planter class was ended’ and ‘a new structure of white classes and a new brand of politics emerged’ (26). Yet, Killian emphasised that ‘memories of the Old South lingered’ into the new era (26). In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward addressed the formative collective experience of Southerners post-Emancipation and its effect on the relationships between the different white classes and the formerly enslaved. He referred to the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ritterhouse opens her book with the memories of a white girl who grew up in Virginia in the 1910s ‘where she learned that she must “talk a little down” to black people while insisting that they talk “up” to her’ (1). Also, the child ‘learned that she must never call a black man “Mr.” or a black woman “Mrs.”’, admitting that these racial rules ‘grooved’ their way into her ‘behaviour, speech and thought’ (1).

experience as a ‘twilight zone that lies between living memory and written history for the favorite breeding places of mythology’ (xii) Correspondingly, In *Whitewashing the South* Kirsten M. Lavelle addresses the collective memory of this era among white Southerners. She defines the Jim Crow Era as a time of ‘overt racism’ during which white people spent their ‘formative years socialized in a Jim Crow society that consistently articulated and institutionalized white superiority and black inferiority’(3-4) Yet, at the same time, Lavelle notes how ‘white southern families proudly taught values of fairness and equality, and many had black people in their lives that they claim to have loved and been loved in return’(4). She described how white elderly people who lived during Jim Crow were invested in ‘seeing themselves – individually and collectively – as good people through the ways they use memory and storytelling’ (3). The writings of both Pickens Tartt and the scholars who have studied her have contributed to this practice noted by Lavelle.

Every publication to date about Pickens Tartt follows a similar pattern: a feminist reading of her biography and practice, emphasising her character as a stubborn woman who rejected the conventions and expectations of women at that time (Brown, Brown & Owens, Tartt, Solomon & Solomon).<sup>20</sup> Brown and Owens, for example, highlight Pickens Tartt’s education and the fact she was the first women to own and drive an automobile in Alabama (11).<sup>21</sup> These publications should be acknowledged for their contribution to the preservation of Pickens Tartt’s work and for emphasising these elements in her biography. However, they must also bear scrutiny for brushing off the racism and exploitation which were central to the

---

<sup>20</sup> The biographical accounts of Pickens Tartt were written posthumously by white Southern scholars devoted to local, often neglected aspects of Southern history. The biography written by Brown and Owens was much more extensive, yet as it was published by an independent publishing house aimed at a general audience it was cut by more than half. However, the theoretical framework of these authors’ published works on various topics ranging from Southern history and culture, folklore, to Native American history, is a preservationist one which does not engage in-depth with new social history, Black or ethnic studies that were established within universities from the late 1960s.

<sup>21</sup> Pickens Tartt studied English and art at Livingston Female Academy and spent a year at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans. In 1901 she moved by herself to New York City to study painting with William Merritt Chase at the Chase School of Art.

very same societal position that they celebrated as well as being integral to her collecting practice. Therefore, these scholars are responsible for memorialising a certain image of Pickens Tartt which not only ignores but reproduces perpetual inequalities among the African American musicians she collected from. While Brown and Owens were aware of the power dynamic in Pickens Tartt's relationship with African Americans, they were motivated by the need to justify or reconcile these aspects. For example, when they stated that this relationship 'followed a pattern of the plantation mistress in pre-Civil War days' and that Pickens Tartt was part of 'this system', they concluded that she 'operated within [...] but she moved beyond it' (13-14). Other examples which impliedly justify the racial discrimination are found in the use of whitewashed terminology such as 'etiquette', 'social amenities' and 'benign paternalism' – common terms in Southern history scholarship of the twentieth-century authored by white scholars.

Therefore, there is something disingenuous in Brown and Owens' assessment of Pickens Tartt's relationship with the African Americans as being akin to that of the plantation mistress, while at the same time justifying this by stating that 'it was a relationship that both races understood because they had grown with it' (Brown & Owens 13). The position that 'the races in Sumter County at least knew where they stood with each other' (13) served to lend legitimacy to racial inequality and provided a free pass to the mechanisms of oppression and exploitation of the era, while failing in the basic responsibility to put the record straight. In her introduction to the collected essays *The House That Race Built*, published in 1997, Whaneema Lubiano spotlights this linkage between 'the idea of race' and the 'operation of racism' as being 'the best friends that the economic and political elite have in the United States. They are the means by which a state and a political economy largely inimical to most of the U.S. citizenry achieve the consent of the governed' (vii). Moreover, Lubiano claims, 'they act as a distorting prism that allows that citizenry to imagine itself functioning as a



moral and just people when ignoring the widespread devastation directed at black Americans particularly, but at a much larger number of people' (vii).

The majority of publications about Pickens Tartt disclose that her father William King Pickens was a prominent cotton planter, or that she 'was born to a prominent farming family' using a language that curtails the low-wage and exploitative labour conditions of the Black workers and sharecroppers. But none of these publications, including the three most extensive assessments of Pickens Tartt's work (those by Brown, Brown & Owens, Solomon & Solomon), reveal further details about the source of the family's wealth before Emancipation. As census records show, Hiram Chiles, Pickens Tartt's great grandfather on her mother's side, enslaved 11 people (Stegall). In the unpublished parts of *Toting the Lead Row*, Brown and Owens mentioned that the Pickens family lost their fortune during the Civil War and that when William was in his twenties he moved to Livingston for its cotton quality and 'plenty of black labor. The Negroes were not slaves anymore, of course, but three-fourths of Sumter County was still blacks'. Pickens started trading in cotton, buying from local farmers and selling in Mobile and New Orleans. Gaining wealth, Pickens soon bought more land around the house of his mother-in-law and started growing cotton, peanuts and pecans. He purchased more land, this time over the railroad tracks behind the house where he could fulfil and expand his interest in breeding fine stock. Beyond these small (unpublished) details, there is little information in these publications concerning Pickens's business such as the number of labourers he employed and their working and living conditions. As these locations were Pickens Tartt's main sites of collecting, this information is crucial to complete a fuller picture of her collecting practice. Thus, it seems that the scholarly efforts to 'rectify the neglect of Mrs. Tartt as folksong collector and as a nourisher of the Afro-American tradition' came at the expense of these concerns and issues (Solomon & Solomon viii).

My decision to focus on Tartt's sense of 'home' – physical, inherited and imagined – is essential for re-integrating issues of race and vital to the exploration of the duality of her domestic space which is characterised by both proximity and oppression. My approach builds on Bilinda Straight's argument that the concept of 'home' should be regarded as a contested arena in which race, class and gender all play a role. Straight claims that the notion of home was often the privilege of some people at the expense, suffering and exclusion of others:

If the white, Euro-American version of the home has implied stability both as a fixed point in space and as an emotionally safe pivot for individual and collective memories, that very stability had been denied to marginalized groups. Individuals in such groups have found themselves literally and figuratively pushed to the margins of a safe home. (7)

She goes on to note that home 'was imagined to the exclusion of its Others – the slave as not human enough, the poor as not fit enough' (8). On the occasion of the Lomaxes' visit to Livingston, Pickens Tartt hosted them in the house while 'Blind' Jesse Harris, who came there to be recorded, stayed in the 'servants' quarter (Brown & Owens 22), as demanded by customs of segregation and racial exclusion in the South.<sup>22</sup> In the unpublished materials by Brown and Owens, Pickens Tartt's daughter Fannie Pickens Inglis recalled that during such visits the household was 'thrown into confusion over where the chauffeur should eat', and that it was 'quite a problem those days with the kitchen full of blacks'.<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Wade, who published *The Beautiful Music All Around Us* three decades after these biographical accounts came out, was the only scholar who critically examined Pickens Tartt's racial politics in direct relation to the music she documented. Writing on Vera Hall, he focused on Lomax and Terrill's third visit to Livingston during which they arrived unannounced at Hall's house. Hall as previously mentioned had recently lost her daughter and

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Blind' Jesse Harris sang and played the accordion. He became very valuable to both Pickens Tartt and Lomax because he knew many folk songs.

<sup>23</sup> Chapter II in the full version manuscript of *Toting the Lead Row*, read with permission courtesy of Tina Naremore Jones at her office at the University of West Alabama, Livingston.

was taking care of her two grandchildren, her ailing mother and her sister, while employed as a domestic worker in the town. Wade writes that despite these circumstances Hall received them kindly and he adds that ‘in what seems painfully symptomatic of the era’s racial etiquette the Lomaxes invited Vera to Ruby Pickens Tartt’s home that evening, an invitation that included her preparing the meals, washing up, and then performing for her hosts’ (155). Hall’s loss, grief and state of being was invisible to these white collectors who had come to be entertained.<sup>24</sup> Wade quoted the sociologist Charles S. Johnson who determined that these ‘etiquettes’ which describe an ‘acceptance of traditional modes of behavior’ (326) were as effective in the race system as the discriminatory laws and the physical threat which Black people faced. Johnson makes an important distinction between on the one hand the necessity and the decision to comply, and on the other hand the recognition of something as accepted, stressing that Black people always saw these etiquettes for what they were – racist and oppressive (326). Following Johnson’s argument, I argue that white collectors such as Pickens Tartt and Lomax were deeply aware of the power they held and of their oppressive behaviour which defined and reinforced the subjugation of Black individuals and communities. For example, in Pickens Tartt’s notes on the origin of her enthusiasm for collecting, she recalls her teenage years with her father: ‘I spent many Sunday afternoons with him sitting out near one of their country churches and listening to them sing’ (Wade 165). She explains that when her father liked the performance he would make a generous contribution to the preacher; in return, the song he favoured was repeated ‘as many times as he liked’ (165). Or, when Pickens Tartt promised to buy a new stove for Dug Hill Church (another African American church she visited to hear people sing), she made her contribution conditional on her intervention into the musical repertoire of the church. She wrote that she would only

---

<sup>24</sup> In her essay ‘Black Women’s Memories and *The Help*’, Valerie Smith describes the asymmetry that often characterises the proximity of relationship between white employers and Black employees during Jim Crow whereby the latter attended to the most intimate details of the lives of the families that employed them.

contribute money 'if they would promise to sing only the old songs, not the printed one from the books' (Brown & Owens 10). Brown and Owens stated that Pickens Tartt 'saw artistry, even genius' in the African American vernacular tradition and that she was 'sensing that much of the black folklore was slipping away' (14). Pickens Tartt's practice, which was informed by imperial patterns which act out the pretence of discovery and preservation, enabled her to take advantage of her status and wealth to intervene and dictate the taste that reinforced the division of power practised for decades. She contributed to the one-dimensional, static, stereotypical space that Black congregators had to abide by and operate within, with little choice or agency.

In *The Man Who Adores the Negro*, Patrick B. Mullen recalled one of his experiences as a white folklorist who collected African American music. During an interview with a woman name Mollie Ford, 'she had turned the interview into a sermon by invoking the traditionalist African American call-and-response pattern, and I had responded in a culturally appropriate way' (Mullen 2). At that time, Mullen thought that the interaction was spontaneous; as a folklorist he called it a 'performance' (2). 'In my mind Mollie Ford and I experienced a moment that transcended racial difference through our emotional agreement about racial equality, and we had done so within a cultural frame that was African American' (2). Mullen, like Pickens Tartt and her fellow folklorists, saw himself and his 'subject' as having the same experience, and never once really enquired or even contemplated that the other person might perceive things differently. Mullen explained that when he published the story of the encounter, scholars criticised him for romanticising the situation and suggested that Ford was actually 'putting him on', 'telling me what she thought I wanted to hear' (2). Several years later when Mullen gave a lecture about Ford, the audience's reaction made him reconsider issues of cultural representation, 'specifically how a white folklorist depicts a black person in terms of preconceived racial notions' (2).

In an undated document from her archive, Pickens Tartt described folk music as ‘an art that grows straight out of the needs of the people’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0021), asserting that it ‘truly reflect[s] the character of the people who sing them so they are “Folk Song”’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0021). She acknowledged that some songs or sounds got their meanings from events that occurred in the past, but regarded the past as something long gone now. In another undated piece of writing, she recounted an event in which she recorded a number of field calls or ‘hollers’ which she described as both rare and lovely: ‘these are more like chants’, she explained. ‘Old Annie Grace remembers them from childhood, whose father Josh learned them first in slave days when they were a communication between slaves on neighbouring plantations. They were used to transfer messages of uprisings, ways of escape and often to arrange a place for lovers to meet’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0021). In her view of songs as merely carriers of stories of the past, stripped of accountability, Pickens Tartt often failed to see the connection between the songs and music and the present experience of the African American men and women she met. Similarly, she neglected to see herself, her family or her proximate white community as instrumental actors and designers of the system that constituted the historical and contemporary conditions expressed in the songs and the music she collected.

A discussion of Pickens Tartt’s collecting practice demands scrutiny of the conjunction between the origin of her interests and the power relationships inherent to her specific class and race position. Initially, Pickens Tartt encountered African Americans as ‘employees’; they were either sharecroppers working for her father or domestic workers in the family home. That is where and when she heard them sing. According to her biography, from a young age she liked to accompany her father on his buggy to oversee the plantation where men, women and children were working on the field. ‘Recognition would light up the blacks’ faces, because the Pickens family was more than “boss” to these people’ because they knew

‘most of them by name, and would ask about aged parents, new babies, family members who were ill’ (Brown & Owens 9).

For Pickens Tartt, African American folk music was ‘purely intuitive’ and ‘not calculated’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0015). ‘It is a product of race and reflects feelings and tastes that are communal rather than personal’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0015). These kinds of racialized assumptions on music were second nature to Pickens Tartt and to various white scholars across disciplines and echo the scientific racism theories such as Social Darwinism and the Eugenics Movement that were spreading at that time.<sup>25</sup> These in turn were used to justify and facilitate the status quo and the policies of segregation and discrimination. The assumptions were found in abundance in the writings of many folklorists from the inception of the field and to a greater extent in the work of those active in the first half of the twentieth-century including John Lomax and his son Alan Lomax. Many of these collectors’ observations were predicated on generalisations at best, and at worst were based on stereotypes and served to perform racial superiority.<sup>26</sup> Pickens Tartt’s attempt to theorise Black cultural expression was inherently racist and it contributed to the setting of the performance, its documentation and its classification in the archive. For example, she described Richard Amerson, a person who became a central figure in her writing and her folk song collection, in an unequivocally racist and stereotypical manner that was widespread within the blackface and minstrel traditions since the antebellum period. She wrote ‘he is one of the most interesting characters in this section of the black belt of Alabama. A happy-go-lucky, laughing, dancing, harp-blowing negro with a wonderful imagination’ (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0014). As William J. Mahar claims in

---

<sup>25</sup> For a review of how the philosophical ideas of scientific racism were used as ‘justification to propose, project, and enact racist social policies’, see Routledge M. Dennis ‘Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and Metaphysics of Race’ ‘Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and Metaphysics of Race’ *Journal of Negro Education*, Summer 1995, 243-252.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in *The Man Who Adores the Negro*, Patrick B. Mullen argues that folklore scholarship has been systematically characterised by the use of stereotypical imagery, albeit considered by many folklorists as unintentional. The hegemonic stereotype of the black folk, he argues, ‘had meant poor, uneducated, rural people’ and this stereotype was considered valid at least until the 1960s (2-3).

*Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, it is the dominant culture's 'desire to maintain political, social, and economic control by transferring false theories of racial inferiority into a form of comic theater designed to demean African Americans' (182). Similarly, when she wrote about the blues, Pickens Tartt mused that whether the singer sings to give way to his sadness or to free himself of it, 'as long as he can smile and sing, I guess he'll get along' (RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0018). Pickens Tartt's repeated emphasis on and expectations of smiles and laughter from these African American performers is very revealing of her racist demeanour.

### **Between Two Photographs**

To demonstrate my analysis of Pickens Tartt's work and to address both the concepts of 'at homeness' and bell hooks's 'homeplace', I turn to discuss several photographs, principally two portraits, and a few sound recordings that have not been studied before now. The two portraits were taken at two different points in time (1900 and 1940) in different houses belonging to Pickens Tartt and the images have more differences than commonalities. Their juxtaposition facilitates my efforts to unpack the historical context as well as the racial tension which is entwined in Pickens Tartt's practice of collecting and recording African American folklore. Such sources reflect racial dynamics and reveal how whiteness and Blackness were portrayed differently and thus archived differently.

There are dozens of photographs in Pickens Tartt's archive and in the several publication about her work. Fewer than half the photographs belong to the family album type, and some depict places in Livingston and were taken between the late nineteenth-century and the early twentieth-century. The other half of the set includes various portraits of African Americans who Pickens Tartt interviewed for different WPA projects (1936-1942). Precise dates and the names of the photographers and those photographed are often missing. I would like to focus on a photograph from the first category that commonly appears in publications

on her work and online: a portrait of the Pickens family (fig. 1.1) most likely taken by a professional photographer around the year 1900 in the family house in Livingston. The portrait was taken on the front porch of their late-Victorian house (fig. 1.2) shows the house from a distance). The trees on their land appear in the background. The family members wear well-fitted garments and their hair is presented impeccably. Interestingly, each one of them is looking in a different direction and none of them is looking towards the camera. While the mother's and the brother's gazes are directed towards the house, the father, as the head of the family, is looking in the opposite direction – probably towards their extended piece of land. Ruby's gaze is hard to read, but it seems to be more aligned with her father's.

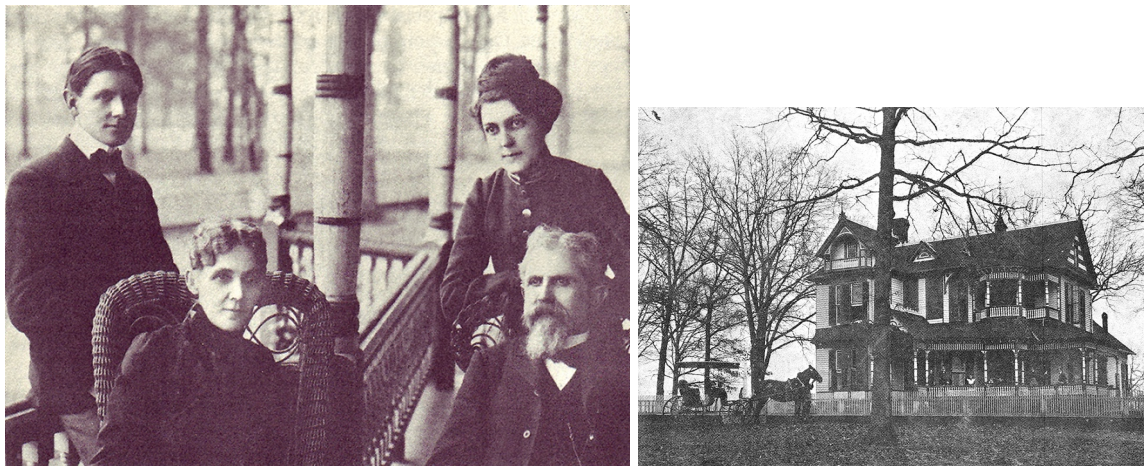


Fig. 1.1. The Pickens Family, ca. 1900. Front: Fannie Short Pickens and William King Pickens. Back: Champ Pickens and Ruby Pickens (Brown & Ownes 6).

Fig. 1.2. Pickens Home, ca. 1900 (Brown & Ownes 4).

In *American Archives*, Shawn Michelle Smith explores how nineteenth-century middle-class Americans ‘utilized visual conceptions of identity to claim gendered and racialized cultural privilege’ (4). The family photo album to which the Pickens family portrait belongs ‘offered individuals a colloquial space in which to display practices of national belonging’ (6). Moreover, Smith adds, ‘using the same photographic technologies and tropes, individuals could mutually affirm their places in an imagined community rooted in discursive fantasies of national character’ (6). Family portraits (paintings and photographs) from colonial



America to the antebellum South and into the beginning of the twentieth-century demonstrate a tradition of constructing what I name as ‘at-homeness’, established through various gestures and the positions of the family members.

Smith states that over ninety per cent of the daguerreotypes made in the mid-nineteenth-century were portraits, claiming that they were ‘images with particular importance as new class signifiers’ (6). Smith cites John Tagg who claims that ‘to have one’s portrait done was one of the symbolic acts by which individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status’ (Smith 37). Alan Trachtenberg is also cited by Smith and points out that these sorts of positions, in which the subject avoids the lens, originated in ancient Roman portraiture and were preserved through lithography and then adopted in photography. His analysis suggests that their faces ‘project a public space, a space for viewing men in the guise of republican virtue: *gravitas, dignitas, fides*’ (48). While Trachtenberg refers to men positioning themselves in such a manner, I suggest that the white middle- and upper-classes sought to stage the family unit in a similar fashion. Such portraiture and positioning conveys a strong impression of status based on ownership of land and labour (and therefore sharecroppers/enslaved people). In 1919, W. E. Dodd depicted the ‘Old South’, also called ‘The Cotton Kingdom’, as a short-lived civilisation with social ideas expressed in the ownership of ‘a mansion, a cotton plantation, and a hundred slaves’ (Cleland 375). This constructed ideal can be seen in the photography of the era. As Laura Wexler argues in *Tender Violence*, ‘the evidence from slavery suggests that the formal principles of family photography can only evolve in relation to the political principles that govern the recognition of families in the first place’ (3). She adds that ‘who would gain control of the domestic signifier through photography has been an issue since the medium was invented in 1839’ (3). The domestic image of a white Southern upper-class family became so distinctive as a type

that gradually it was spared the need to be staged to its fullest extent. Saying that, upon reading the Pickens family portrait, we can regard their posture and observe their clothes and accessories (such as the father's pocket-watch chain), the straw armchair, the house columns decorated with handmade affixing details, the balcony design and the blurry landscape in the background, all of which serve to create that comfortable image of 'at-homeness' and ownership.

The photograph of the Pickens family (fig. 1.1) was taken at the turn of the century. Nation-wide, the social and political atmosphere was saturated with white supremacy. Rayford Logan identified the period that lasted between 1877 and 1901 as the 'Nadir' and argued that it was crucial to the shaping of American race relations: 'On the pediments of the separate wing reserved for Negroes were carved, Exploitation, Disenfranchisement, Segregation, Discrimination, Lynching, Contempt', he wrote (313). Logan explored the implementation of discriminatory state policies, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and other forces that were directed towards the disenfranchisement of African Americans and the maintenance of white supremacy.<sup>27</sup> On September 3, 1901, the year following the Pickens family photograph, the state of Alabama adopted a constitution which was overtly white supremacist, as the language of its promotional documents articulated and as the newspaper headlines celebrated immediately afterwards (figs. 1.3 and 1.4). It outlawed interracial marriage,

---

<sup>27</sup> After the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in January 1865, the Southern States added provisions to their state constitutions that were intended to control and limit the movement, liberty and equality of the freed men and women. Carol Anderson for example links the rise of white supremacy and expressions of what she calls White Rage to Black advancement. Hence, once the enslaved were emancipated it led immediately to the rise of state officials or to individuals and mob that organised and sought to repress such advancements. 'Like hydra, white supremacist regimes sprang out of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the other states of a newly formed resurgent south.' Their constitutions, Anderson claims, were defiant and dismissive of any supposed federal authority 'ready to reassert and reimpose white supremacy as if the abolition of slavery and the Civil War had never happened'. See Anderson, chapter one. In his sixteenth chapter 'Back Toward Slavery' in *The Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois addressed and analysed the lawlessness that characterized this period, bringing to the fore reports from across the south on massive killings and fear inducing actions directed at Black people in order to reestablish their subordination.

mandated separate schools and purposely and legally disenfranchised Black voters and suppressed Black political power.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 1.3. *The Choctaw Advocate*, 1901, November 6, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Newspaper Clipping.

Fig. 1.4. *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 1901, November 12, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Newspaper Clipping.

The background about the Nadir period and Alabama's 1901 constitution is highly pertinent for the reading of this specific family photograph, drawing on Wexler's claim that photography and family portraiture in particular 'is not separable from the social system in which it was embedded' (4). It is clear that photography was yet another arena in which oppression and inequalities materialised.

The second photograph from 1940 (fig. 1.5) belongs to the Lomax Collection.<sup>29</sup> Between 1934 and 1940, Ruby T. Lomax in all took ninety photographs of which almost all were portraits. Eleven portraits were taken during their 1940 trip to Livingston. This trip took place at the peak of the New Deal and the Great Migration. For the New Deal, it was a unifying goal that all citizens be part of a collective effort to fight a common challenge.<sup>30</sup> To

<sup>28</sup> According to the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), in Alabama approximately 75,000 African Americans were registered to vote before the 1901 constitution was enacted. As a result of the constitution this number was reduced to less than 30,000 voters. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/sep/03>

<sup>29</sup> The Lomax Collection includes the combined collections of the various people in the Lomax Family: John A. Lomax and Ruby Terrill Lomax, Alan Lomax, Bess Lomax Hawes and John A. Lomax Jr. who contributed in different periods to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

<sup>30</sup> The impression that the economic crash had an equal effect across different ethnic groups and sectors of society was enhanced by the widespread panic created as a way of mobilising people for the sake of national unity: 'the depth of the Great Depression helped foster a general sense of shared national destiny—that the nation's citizens would rise or fall together' (Cowie & Salvatore 3). Similarly, Suzanne Mettler argues that uniting the citizens around ideas of solidarity was essential, 'particularly in a diverse and multicultural society, to community life, political allegiance, and social peace' (10)..

this end, data collection, cultural production and visual representations played an important role in building a new image of the nation – one of plurality, diversity and unity. Pickens Tartt, who started collecting and documenting for herself as a young girl, was working at the time for the WPA. The Great Depression affected her condition and standard of living: ‘at once I fired the cook’ (Jones 212), forcing her to seek employment. It was then that word of her vast familiarity with a wide range of African American folklore circulated beyond local circles. ‘The great Depression deprived the Tartt family of its land and financial resources’ (Stone & Harold). Her husband William Pratt Tartt lost his job and they had to sell the family house (seen in the family portrait previously discussed) and rent a ‘modest house’ – the house in Baldwin Hill where the second portrait was taken. ‘I discovered overnight that not only had we no jobs and no money, but we were in debt’ (Brown & Owens 12) was how Pickens Tartt described her new situation, yet this did not seem to impact her standard of living for which she retained the services of a domestic worker during this time as evident from various accounts presented in this chapter. In 1935 she took a WPA sewing job and in the following year she received a phone call from Myrtle Miles, chair of the WPA Writers’ Project in Alabama. Miles gave Pickens Tartt her first assignment to collect eight spirituals: ‘I knew how little she knew of the time it would take to get the verses to eight songs. I told her spirituals didn’t thrive around the courthouse square, that I might drive all day in the country and never find one complete song, one person would know one verse, one another and so on.’ (Brown & Owens 13). But Miles insisted, so Pickens Tartt collected those songs, attaching a letter with an explanation about each of them. Her letter was sent to John Lomax, who was at the time the National Advisor on Folklore to the WPA, during which period he composed its collecting guidelines and questionnaires. Pickens Tartt described Lomax as ‘our greatest authority on folk songs’ (13). He replied with the following: ‘may I come at once to see you with my recorder. I am not familiar with any of the songs you have sent me. Your area must

be rich in folk music' (13). Before long, various prominent figures had paid visits to Livingston, Alabama, where Pickens Tartt hosted them with great pleasure, excited to meet with those who shared her interests and to be consulted as a local authority. Unlike herself, these visitors had already established careers as writers or researchers, and most of them had access to the proper equipment and resources as well as to various platforms of distribution including universities, publications and archives. Those advantages generated institutional visibility and status for these materials and to Pickens Tartt's work and talent as a WPA employee, which included writing for both *Slave Narratives* and the *Life Histories Project*. Even though she was always given credit in these collectors' work, her contribution in that context was regarded as that of an informant or other secondary definition, owing to their different institutional positions. As briefly commented by John Lomax and Ruby T. Lomax in their notes from one of their visits to Livingston: 'Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt was again our chief assistant, guide and ramrod' (Lomax & Lomax 219).

The second photograph I wish to discuss (fig. 1.5) features Mrs Hettie Godfrey standing at its centre. Godfrey was a gifted singer in her late thirties at the time of the picture. She was photographed by Ruby Terrill Lomax, who assisted her husband and documented their third recording expedition in 1940 (the first was 1937, the second 1939) for the LoC. As the photograph inscription teaches us, the racial order is manifested in the archive until this day; whereas Pickens Tartt is referred to as 'Mrs.', Godfrey's name is not attached to a title. Godfrey was recorded by Lomax earlier, during their previous visit, singing 'I'm Gwine Home on de Mornin' Train' with Jesse Allison and Doc Reed. Over the course of ten days, between the 25th of October and the 4th of November 1940, the Lomaxes recorded 204 different songs, with 34 musicians, of which Godfrey sang 20 songs.



Fig. 1.5. Hettie Godfrey at the house of Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama. Lomax, Ruby T. 1940 Nov.1, Lomax Collection, Library of Congress.

Godfrey worked as Pickens Tartt's cleaner and cook. In this portrait she is seen standing at the foot of the stone steps to the rear of Pickens Tartt's rented house in Baldwin Hill. She is wearing a typical maid's dress and a starched white apron that indicate her occupation as a domestic worker. A broom is resting on a chair at the top of the steps behind her. In *Toting the Lead Row*, Brown and Owens described a situation in which Pickens Tartt tells her guests, the Lomaxes, that Godfrey has a special song she sings while sweeping the floor. Terrill Lomax asked Godfrey if she would sing it for her. Was this portrait an attempt to stage a scene that would resonate or complement this anecdote, to create an image that ties Godfrey to that entangled space of Black entertainment and labour in front of white spectators? Was Godfrey requested by Terrill Lomax or Pickens Tartt to step outside and pose for this photograph? Or was she taking a break from her work, having left her broom on the

porch, and was met by Terrill Lomax? Either way, there is something hesitant in her posture, uncomfortable even. Her hand held behind the back gives the impression that she is not at ease, not exactly sure what is expected of her. She is not the owner of the house. Nor does her occupation – as the person who takes care of the house – afford her the feeling of being ‘at home’. Unlike the Pickens family portrait, Godfrey directs her eyes to the camera; her gaze does not shy away, but it is not entirely direct, and there is something wondering in her eyes.

The gaze plays a central role in photography scholarship and even more so in documentary photography discourse. The gaze reveals the power relationships in place (photographer, photographed subject and spectator) and can manifest resistance and self-definition, as well as objectification and exploitation. bell hooks emphasises the power of the gaze of both the photographed and the spectator by claiming that ‘there is power in looking’ (‘The Oppositional Gaze’ 115). hooks discusses the contentious history of the gaze as a deliberate means of control and humiliation in the oppressive mechanism of slavery and racialised society: ‘the politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that slaves were denied their right to gaze’ (115). Alex Bontemps notes that in the American South a certain protocol was ‘governing how and when, or whether, Blacks could look at others’ (12). Bontemps notes the differences between looking *to* and looking *at* that were established as an oppressive means to demonstrate the enslaver’s power, whereby the enslaved could look *to* their enslavers as it was ‘necessary and required that they do so’, but he adds ‘it was not expected that they look *at* them’ (13). To look directly into the eyes of their enslavers was an act by an enslaved person that could lead to further punishment. For decades, Black men were beaten and even lynched after being accused of looking at white women.

Adopting the framework and tools articulated in the collection of essays *Picturing Us*, we can address the issue which Deborah Willis calls ‘image making and interpretation, subjectivity and representation’ (pxi). It is relevant, Willis argues, to ‘look into how

photographs have been used; what are the implications of stereotyping; what is self-conscious imagery, how gender is being portrayed; what assumptions are made of girls in gender-specific roles; of black male imagery; of socially conscious, race conscious imagery' (xi). How does Godfrey's portrait align with a tradition of photography that was proliferated with 'negative, derogatory, images of black people' as Willis asks? (13). Godfrey's portrait does not immediately seem to be an example of a negative or derogatory image of a Black person, and one can assume that that was not the photographer's intention, yet the portrait is actively reproducing a stereotypical image of a Black woman in the eyes of a white person; an obedient domestic worker who has to comply with all manner of requests such as entertaining strangers and has no choice in how she could be represented or remembered.

Houston A. Baker Jr. repeatedly highlights in his written work the importance of the right to self-representation. A single paragraph about his grandfather's daily routine offers an example pertinent to my discussion of 'image making and interpretation, subjectivity and representation' (xi) concerning Godfrey's portrait. Baker writes: 'my grandfather left home each day dressed in a shirt and a tie. He stowed his lunch in a satchel. At Brown and Williamson, he put on a janitor's outfit and swept monumental factory floors through summer heat and winter cold' (8). This recollection sheds light on the importance of self-fashioning and self-representation among the different generations of African Americans in different periods. Baker's grandfather, like Godfrey, was obliged to perform a very limited set of jobs that maintained a status quo marked by class, race and gender division, yet he insisted on this routine of self-fashioning, through which he asserted his identity before and after his work shift as a janitor, refusing to be defined only by that role. In *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens*, Rebecca Sharpless notes that the employer's demand of servants that they wear uniforms illustrates a method of control that was essential to delineating 'a cook's acceptable place in her employer's world and reinforcing Jim Crow society' (144). Sharpless further



argues that uniforms not only made the African American women hyper-visible and on display in a white enclave, but also negated their individuality: ‘when she removed her own clothing and donned a uniform, a domestic worker became someone whose primary function was to serve the family that had stripped her of her own identity’ (144). Terrill Lomax’s photograph, which captures a uniformed and apron-clad Godfrey with a broom visible in the background, denies Godfrey what Baker’s grandfather held so dear about his morning routine. The photograph also omits from the frame any signifiers of the very reason Godfrey was photographed in the first place – she was a singer.

When addressing the problematic history of photographing Black people, Willis asks herself and others to find ways to ‘challenge those images’ by ‘identifying the breadth and depth of experiences of black people as recorded in photographs’ (xi). Terrill Lomax’s photograph of Godfrey reflects the state of affairs in which Pickens Tartt’s African American employees can (and should, she believes) supply both services and entertainment to their employer and her white guests. Why was Godfrey not photographed performing in front of the microphone, as was the case for Doc Reed and Richard Amerson? (figs. 1.6 and 1.7): both are seen seated in the garden next to the microphone and in front of Lomax. Godfrey as a Black woman is bound to the house – more accurately to its threshold – by the servile domestic nature of her role within the Pickens Tartt household.



Fig. 1.6. Richard Amerson and John A. Lomax, Sr., at the home of Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama. Lomax, Ruby T. 1940 Oct. 27, Lomax Collection, Library of Congress.

Fig. 1.7. Doc Reed; John A. Lomax, Sr.; and Richard Amerson at the home of Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama. Lomax, Ruby T. 1940 Oct. 27, Lomax Collection, Library of Congress.

It is useful to compare Godfrey's portrait with a portrait taken two years later (1942) by Gordon Parks, the only African American photographer of the New Deal photography agency – Farm Security Administration (FSA) era, during his Rosenwald Fellowship (fig. 1.8). This is the portrait of Ella Watson who was working as a cleaner in a government building housing the FSA offices in Washington D.C. This iconic portrait titled 'Washington D.C. Government Charwoman' is often labelled 'American Gothic' for the resemblance of its arrangement to Grant Wood's famous 1930 painting with that title. While Terrill Lomax's portrait sought to reaffirm Godfrey's place, persona and role as a domestic worker, Parks turned the issues into a visual problem. He accentuates the intrinsic role of photography and portraiture of Black people in a system that is designed to keep them at the service of white people and outside of the body politic. Parks was intimately familiar with the reality of Black women working for white people – his mother Sarah worked as a domestic for all her life (Mason). Parks was encouraged to introduce himself to Watson by Roy Stryker, the white director of the FSA. He deliberately avoided a voyeuristic approach and described how he first talked to Watson, heard her life story, and only then ventured to ask to photograph her.

He took two frames that night – this famous portrait is one of them. It is boldly composed: Watson holds an inverted broom and mop, which are contrasted with the American flag. It is considered by many to be an indictment of American society and its rampant racism and discrimination towards its Black citizens.<sup>31</sup> It was certainly a ‘collaborative endeavour’ as Michael Lobel defined it (Lobel). Parks invited Watson to take an active role in defying the ways Black women are depicted and captured in imagery, resisting the tradition of derogatory representations, and challenging white society’s expectations of Black women to comply with this status quo of racism and discrimination. Following that evening and for the next four months, Parks took 90 photographs depicting Watson’s life. It was an intimate process and it was Watson who invited Parks in. She welcomed him to her home and introduced him to her private domestic spaces where he could learn her religious rituals, meet her family members, get familiar with their living environment, witness the love and affection they shared with each other, hear and see the noise and mess of little children. She also introduced him to her community, her church and its members. It is worth emphasising that the genuine interest and respect demonstrated by Parks towards Watson was non-existent in the practice of the white collectors who approached Godfrey.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hear Gordon Parks speak on this photograph: <http://100photos.time.com/photos/gordon-parks-american-gothic>; see Mason ‘Gordon Parks, Ella Watson, a Boy, a Bugle, and the American Flag’ and ‘Gordon Parks’ American Gothic.’



Fig. 1.8. Gordon Parks, Washington, D.C. Government charwoman. Aug 1942. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/2017765074/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2017765074/)>.

bell hooks' conceptualisation of 'homeplace' aligns well with Parks's series of portraits of Watson and also with Willis's scholarship in the way it pays respect to Black women and cherishes the spaces that they have created within their houses. She writes:

In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith. The folks who made this life possible, who were our primary guides and teachers, were black women. (383)

hooks's attention to these spaces and the legacy of these women resonates well with the experiences of both Hall and Godfrey who provided services and sang for Pickens Tartt and her guests. It demands that we are attentive to what was at stake in this system which kept Black women away from their houses and it reminds us of the reality of their intimate domestic spaces.

Their lives were not easy. Their lives were hard. They were black women who for the most part worked outside the home serving white folks, cleaning their houses, washing their clothes, tending their children – black women who worked in the fields or in the streets, whatever they could do to make ends meet, whatever was necessary. Then they returned to their homes to make life happen there (383).

Moreover, hooks situates these spaces of care, nurturance and learning ‘in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination’ as a historical and continuing site of resistance (348). Black women, she argues ‘resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world’ (384). Building on hooks’s proposition I turn to think of the intergenerational care, exchange and learning experiences performed by Godfrey. Godfrey’s favorite song – so we learned from the Lomaxes’ field notes – was the game song ‘Satisfied’ (Brown & Ownes 33). Godfrey insisted on delaying the recording of this song until her teenage daughter, Annie, could join her. They sang this song together, as well as other ‘call and response’ songs. Godfrey’s recordings from the LoC provide the opportunity not simply to familiarise ourselves with the songs she knew, but no less important, to appreciate Godfrey’s musical decisions pertaining to the way the songs were recorded – only when her beautiful singing was combined with that of her daughter.

Construing her request to sing with her daughter as a deliberate musical choice re-centres her as an artist who is performing not only for the collectors, but as the artist who stages the way her song will survive for others to hear – as something that transpires between a mother and daughter and is transmitted from the one to the other. Studying Godfrey’s photograph alongside indirect quotes of her utterance together with the recording of their singing, enables the reconstruction of a fuller portrait of Godfrey and a broader picture of this event and its significance, the imposed structure, the exchange with the collectors, and its aftermath.

The recording starts with ‘All Hid’, a children’s game song. On a compilation of songs published in 1942, Lomax wrote that children’s game songs ‘retain some of the oldest elements of folk culture, but often they are much influenced by the fashions of the year and of the locality in which they are sung’ (Lomax ‘Afro-American Blues and Game Songs’). The

only documentation of 'All Hid' I could find show that it was recorded in Sumter county, performed by Godfrey in 1940 and by Vera Hall in 1948, and it could be assumed a local song as Lomax suggests. Lomax noted that 'All Hid' was 'a counting rhyme for hide-and-go-seek' (Lomax 'Afro-American Blues and Game Songs'), which could very well be the case. However, as several African American scholars have argued, children's game songs often concealed hidden messages, as was the case with some other African American folk songs. In *Negro Folk Rhymes (Wise and Otherwise)* from 1922, Thomas W. Talley explained that game songs historically were 'little rays of sunshine in the dark dreary monotonous lives of black slave children' (234), but they were also 'instilled into children as warnings' (240). Such songs in Talley's collection are 'Young Master and Old Master', 'The Alabama Way', and 'You Had Better Mind Master'. Decades later, based on her ethnographic work and drawing on her own experience growing up in the segregated South, Marvelene C. Moore argued that games and songs played an important role in addressing issues of racism, poverty and social injustice faced by the African American community (351). She writes that 'it was through the hand clapping songs, jump rope chants, and singing games of African American children that issues of identity and status were addressed, particularly within the historic communities of the American South' (351). She further adds that children in the South 'created games that served to confirm their self-image and worth, especially when white oppressors treated them as less than human' (353). The recording of Godfrey singing 'All Hid' reveals that although Lomax's transcription consists of three verses Godfrey in fact sang three more. Here is Lomax's transcript of Godfrey's song:

*Chorus:*

All Hid?

All Hid?

Five, ten fifteen, twenty.

'S all hid?

1. Way down yonder by devil's town,  
    Devils knocked my daddy down.  
    Is all hid?       Chorus.
2. Six little horses in the stable,  
    One jumped out and skinned his nable.  
    Is all hid?
3. Old man Ned fell out of bed,  
    Cracked his head on a hot piece of lead.  
    Is all Hid?       Chorus.

In both Godfrey's and Hall's versions a fourth verse stands out and it goes as follows: 'Way down yonder timber town / N- gotta work till the sun goes down.'<sup>32</sup> Moore's thesis resonates well with this fourth verse, for it is an overt comment on African Americans' working conditions in the fields throughout the Southern States since slavery and during the Jim Crow era when it was recorded. In both singers' versions, the verse reframes differently the earlier verses and the song as a whole. In his research on the 'devil' in African American music, Adam Gussow observes that aside from its possible Christian reference, since slavery the devil was also used as a metaphor for the white man (Gussow *Beyond the Crossroads*). The devil, he explained in an interview, 'was a figure who was chaining you, who was apprehending you in the woods' and songs about the devil were a 'coded way of invoking the patrollers' (Gussow 'Adam Gussow Publishes'). The context of labour and surveillance that characterised both slavery and the Jim Crow era with its convict leasing and sharecropping situates the game in a way that challenges and confronts Lomax's understanding of game songs. As both Talley and Moore suggest, the song could be a window into games and songs in the shadow of white supremacy. 'All Hid' might serve as a warning, attesting to the way white supremacy, surveillance and labour shaped aspects of life and recreation, albeit needing to be transmitted in a playful way.

---

<sup>32</sup> This is my transcription. I am using the N-word instead of writing the full word. Godfrey's recording is less clear than Hall's and she might be saying 'jailbird' or 'Jaybird' instead of timber.

Godfrey follows with 'Little Sally Walker', a song with roots in British lore as a wedding tradition (jumping over a saucer) but which was adopted and altered throughout the Black diaspora as a dance/game song. According to Courlander, it was sung across the American South as well as in Harlem (Courlander, *Negro Folk Music of Alabama*). Trinidadian musician Norman Span, also known as King Radio, recorded his variation titled 'Sally Water' in the 1950s and around the same time that Jamaican musician Louise Bennett-Coverley recorded hers. Godfrey effortlessly reaches the highest octaves while singing 'Give me a gourd o' drink water'. It is accompanied by a short explanation of how such a song is carried by a group in a ring formation, and her statement of responsibility in saying her name and the place of the recording. These statements of responsibility were conceived to keep order and track of contributions. However, the way these musicians were treated as informants of a sort deserves some attention, since something more telling is enfolded within it. It seems as if the request made to Godfrey to identify herself on the record served to overshadow or disrupt the intimate and playful exchange she was engaged in just moments before with her daughter. Godfrey uttered her statement quickly, in a seemingly detached manner, as if she was less keen to perform this act of identification.

After a few songs which she sang alone, Hettie Godfrey was joined by her daughter Annie. The dynamic between them is moving and revealing: a mother and a daughter who were familiar with and enjoyed each other's rhythm, immersing themselves in their tunes. In their shared intimacy of singing to each other, they perform that they know more than what those who record them can obtain from their singing. They sing 'Won't that be a time', a slow song, maybe a spiritual, which Annie opens and leads, singing each verse to which her mother responds as if she was seeking her affirmation: 'Won't it be a mighty time?' she asks, and Hettie replies 'won't it be a time'. After a few calls and responses, Annie stopped her singing and concluded the song. In the background, a woman (either Pickens Tartt or Terrill Lomax)



asks ‘is there more?’, prompting Annie to resume her singing by adding a few more verses to the song. In alignment with the lyrics of the song ‘I lost my needle’, they reverse roles and now Hettie sings the lines to which Annie replies. No stage instructions were needed, as it is clear that they had the comfortable habit of singing together.

To emphasise the potential in reading these images along and against the grain, it is important to point out their problematic context and also locate them within an entirely different arena in which Black people defined and reconstructed their own images.<sup>33</sup> As bell hooks sees it, in the world before racial integration ‘there was a constant struggle on the part of black folks to create a counter-hegemonic world of images that would stand as a visual resistance, challenging racist images’ (‘Homeplace’ 46). All colonised and subjugated people who through the resistance created ‘an oppositional subculture within the framework of domination recognise that the field of representation (how we see ourselves, how others see us)’ operated within ‘a site of ongoing struggle’ (46). hooks’s words provide a lens through which we can address the past and the abundant familiar and unfamiliar images that were accumulated in both private and public archives. As Saidiya Hartman shows, creativity, speculation and juxtaposition are necessary to the process of inquiring and attempting to complete the missing pieces of a more fulsome picture of individuals and communities. It begs many questions. Did Godfrey ever receive a copy of the portrait Terrill Lomax took? What other images were hung at Godfrey’s house? Or in the houses of her children or grandchildren? Did she have other portraits of herself? Were the pictures taken upon her request by a member of her family or in a professional studio? Shifting the focus onto the performers like Godfrey, from whom Pickens Tartt collected, and refusing to treat these

---

<sup>33</sup> See Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, *Viewfinders : Black Women Photographers*, 1985; and the following books by Deborah Willis: *Early Black Photographers, 1840-1940/23 Postcards*, 1985; *Reflections in Black*, 2000; *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery*, 2013.

performers as a part of a homogeneous group, is one way of critically engaging with Pickens Tartt's collection.

### **Bearing witness outside 'at-homeness' and towards 'homeplace'**

During her tenure as chair of the local Writers Project in Sumter County (ca.1935-1942), Pickens Tartt collected testimonies and oral histories from dozens of people. Unlike the period when she hosted people at her home and held public recording sessions in her garden, in this newer phase it was she who went to other people's houses. During her employment with WPA, her perspective on Southern grandeur and her notion of home began to fracture. This, I argue, had to do with the fact that these work exchanges took place outside her home, where scenes of labour and entertainment had been entangled. These excursions, and chiefly the refusal enacted by the African American men and women she met, challenged Pickens Tartt's notions of home, place and local history. This affected her writing but also her interactions with the African American men and women she met, even if it did not dismantle her deeply embedded racism.

WPA workers had to adhere to the often restrictive prescribed questionnaires. Pickens Tartt deviated from this norm and often wrote about her own experiences of the interview in her own free style. Pickens Tartt seemed to experiment with different kinds of prose and it is hard to identify a particular style among the various manuscripts in her collection. Her inconsistency was not only of style and prose but also in the way she engaged with what she heard or saw, how she positioned herself in relation to her interviewees, and in the level at which she made herself present in the text. The only thing that is common to all of the texts is her insistence on recording the spoken dialect. She often favoured a mix between a narrative form and reportage, as could be seen here:<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> John A. Lomax, who was National Advisor on Folklore for the WPA's FWP and was responsible for such guidelines, described his instructions as 'detailed and homely questions' (Brown & Owens 60). As a result of her

I had left the McDowell road far behind me and had been driving several miles along a winding, rutted wagon track through fields of unpicked cotton. A sudden turn brought me abruptly to a cabin door. A tall patch of sorghum shimmering and swaying in the light afternoon breeze sheltered and concealed it on one side; behind it a limestone bluff shone whitely against the deep green of the cedars and pines which crowned it; and in the foreground, at a little distance, stretched the swamp, dark and impenetrable, and to the imaginative mind teeming with a mysterious, even threatening, life of its own. A blue haze rose from it and clung above it, and (perhaps it was the mood to which the lonely drive had keyed my senses) a brooding disquieting, atmosphere hung over the entire scene. (Pickens Tartt 'Susanna Ross')

Here she describes her journey to meet the 110 year-old Susanna Ross whose testimony was included in the *Life Histories Project* compiled by the FWP. The paragraph seems to start with a moment of reflection. I propose to read it as a typical example of the way Pickens Tartt encountered physically the decay of the South during her excursions. It is hard to determine the exact nature of the atmosphere she described. Is the 'brooding disquieting, atmosphere hung over the entire scene' a single moment that subverts the established image of the South, in her eyes as a white privileged Southerner, by transforming the familiar into something disquieting, disturbing, resonating? Or is it something else? Is it a sad, nostalgic tone that acknowledges the decline and observes how a 'world of grandeur and splendour' is now seen in its decay and ruin? The second interpretation becomes more obvious in Pickens Tartt's recollection of a visit to a house in Tishabee, Alabama, which was once owned by an enslaver named Bob Hawkins and was left to his only child, Charles Darwin Hawkins. This narrative was published in a collection of testimonies from 1945 titled *Mid Country; Writings from the Heart of America* (Wimberly 334-50). Pickens Tartt set out on this visit following hearsay that Hawkins, being 'one of the local intelligentsia' (Brown 115), had a rare old books collection, and she wanted to see it. Pickens Tartt described what she saw, first from the outside of the house: a run-down picket fence, a fallen chimney that created a great hole in the

---

deviations, some of Pickens Tartt's manuscripts were rejected and some were even destroyed by Miles, the state editor (Brown 44; Brown & Owens p 24, 28, 41).

roof, a rotten gallery with no proper steps to climb up, a green lizard, and dust that had accumulated over years of neglect: ‘No one answered my “hello”, the customary greeting of the country people; so I pulled myself up by one of the rickety old pillars and made my way with difficulty to the door, a door which seemed to have kinship with the vines that curled around it’ (115). Pickens Tarrt again used the term ‘brooding’ which had appeared in the previous account: ‘there was such a sense of desolation *brooding* over the seemingly abandoned house’ (115), which made her ‘dr[a]w back in dread’ (115). Eventually, having knocked on the door to no avail, she found her way in.

On both occasions, Pickens Tarrt did not end up meeting those she initially planned to meet. In the first case she stepped into the cabin’s gallery calling out for a woman named Carrie, while ‘an ancient and emaciated Negress woman rose and embraced me’ (Brown & Owens 61). Her name was Susanna Ross, she was Carrie’s mother and she became the centre of the narrative. In the second account she described in a very prejudiced manner an old Black person who was very polite to her ‘though with an odd detachment’ (Brown 115). He informed her that Charles Hawkins was out and would be back by dusk, and invited her to step in and rest from her long journey.

Many scholars celebrated Pickens Tarrt’s unconventional character (Jones, Brown & Owens, Brown, Solomon & Solomon). However, there is a consistent feature that I identify in her writing that testifies to another aspect of her character and upsets her reputation as an unconventional person – her attachment to and embeddedness in the materiality of her class. This comes through strongly in her detailed account of the decay she observed when she got inside that house. In the narrative, her shock and turmoil was apparent with every step she took and described. She provided exhaustive detail of every bit of evidence of neglect: ‘there were several small pieces of mid-Victorian furniture, though nothing of interest’ (Brown 115); ‘hung with cobwebs, stood an early American piece, a small cupboard’ (115-6) that was

covered with so much grease and dirt that ‘I rather felt than saw it was pine’ (116). When she observed a collection of antique plates, for example, she disclosed with excitement that ‘gossipy legend has it that there was once a pair of exquisite and rare Sandwich compotes and half a dozen variants of the ‘Tree of Life’ design’ (116). This goes on for two more pages until she finally decided to leave. She did explicitly acknowledge and reflect on her exceptional reaction, explaining that ‘while most houses with their mellow flavor radiate a subtle sympathy and understanding, my reaction to this destruction was that of suffocating disgust’ (Brown 117). The carelessness and mustiness of ‘soiled lace curtains’ and ‘worn-out carpets’ almost made her faint to a point when she felt ‘an immediate need of fresh air’ (117).

This process of reflection reached a certain peak when she confessed to a feeling of being ‘companied by the past’ and that to her surprise it was not a ‘feeling of gentle, unobtrusive and friendly ‘ghosts’ which one is so apt to feel in the presence of old bethumbed books, but it was that of less understanding, though invisible tenants’ (Brown 117). Her thrilling account continued with the arrival of such ghosts – an old Black woman, who scared Pickens Tarrt with ‘the sound of a shuffling feet’ that echoed in the empty room, ‘the clang of a door being closed’ and a voice which she ‘can never forget, but can only describe as being so lifeless and flat that one might walk on it’ (118). Pickens Tarrt mentioned that the woman was called Earthy Ann. Between the lines of revulsion and fear expressed by Pickens Tarrt, Ann emerged as a determined and articulate person who is not willing to accommodate and satisfy this uninvited guest. Their exchange was a fascinating one: Ann resisted and rejected stereotypes imposed on her by Pickens Tarrt; she was not polite, she did not grant her any smiles or extended hospitality, she was not religious as Pickens Tarrt assumed she was. At the same time, Pickens Tarrt’s transparent narration revealed her own prejudices and ignorance and ironically enabled Ann to express herself as clearly as she did. For example, when Pickens Tarrt overheard Ann’s conversation with a young Black woman regarding a barbecue

to be held in a nearby church, Pickens Tartt thought she had found a way to get Ann to open up to her: ‘Here at last was the open door. Earthy Ann would talk of religion; any Negro will, the one thing buried so deep in the Negro’s being that nothing can disturb’ (120). She was so excited by this opportunity that she even hoped Ann ‘might even sing one of those old emotional and syncopated laments so irresistible in its rhythmical appeal’ (120).

This degree of transparency in these kinds of reflections, which illuminate Pickens Tartt’s attitudes and feelings so vividly as we read her account of her encounter with Ann, appeared only seldom in Pickens Tartt’s work spanning over almost six decades. When it did occur, it was mostly within the context of the *Slaves Narratives* and the *Life Histories Project* she collected and wrote. This casts light on her approach toward folk song collecting and her role as ‘informant’: both seem to be the continuation of habit and mindset in which class and racial roles had not really changed since the time of slavery – they just wore different guises.

Pickens Tartt’s texts for both series were not free of the stereotypical, prejudiced language that crosses all her written work, but they are different from those related to her sense of ‘at-homeness’ that characterised her music collecting endeavours and hosting practice. It seems that in these series, she switched her position and embodied, to some degree, a different function – bearing witness. ‘These [the ex-slaves’ interviews] had to be verbatim, so I learned to write exactly what the Negro said. Because of my interest in the Negro, and the fact that I’d never looked into a book on writing when I attempted to write a real story, I naturally turned to him for guidance’ (Brown 181). James Seay Brown, Jr. and David Taylor, the editors of *Up Before Daylight: Life Histories from the Alabama Writers’ Project, 1938-1939* believe that ‘The elderly black men and women who told her stories of life under slavery were more open to her than they would have been to a white stranger because of the close relationship that they had had with her and her family’ (viii). Pickens Tartt drove all over the county and state looking for materials. However, in most cases the

collecting or documenting took place in mundane settings with people she knew well who she had spent many hours with for so many years, needing no guidelines or questionnaires. For example, when describing her familiarity with Rich Amerson, who became one of the main protagonists in many of her published stories for the *Life Histories Project* and for other independent pieces published in several literary journals, she wrote: ‘I knew from the twinkle in Rich’s eye and the familiar chuckle that it was probably going to be a good story, so I pulled a chair near the door to listen’ (RPT\_Box11\_FQ4\_0001).

As Catherine A. Stewart notes in *Long Past Slavery*, the *Slave Narratives* collection garnered both ‘conflict and complexity’ (2) as it produced ‘competing visions of the past and conflicting views on black identity and black citizenship’ (2). The criticism focused on the validity of remembrance, as well as on issues of representation and authenticity of both the formerly enslaved and the majority of the white interviewers.<sup>35</sup> Pickens Tartt was known for being faithful to her interviewees and the stories she heard, transcribing them as they were told. As Brown and Taylor claim, such degree of trust was ‘evident in the length of the interviews and in the types of negative details that one usually finds only in the narratives that were recorded by black interviewers, such as beating, whippings, and their hatred of the overseers and patrollers’ (viii). However, she was criticised in the late 1990s for her mistreatment of an interviewee. As part of their research for the publication of Sumter County Slave Narratives that were assembled for the book *Gabr’l Blow Sof’* (1997), Alan Brown and David Taylor traced locations mentioned in the testimonies as well as living family members of the interviewees in order to verify or address certain aspects of those narratives. They

---

<sup>35</sup> For example, some believed the reported age of the interlocutors were problematic – they were either too old at the time of the interview or too young to remember accurately life under slavery as young children. Another criticism directed at the collection of *Slave Narratives* is that the interviewers tended to change the testimonies, to soften the harsh things. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips was among the historians who argued that these testimonies were unreliable (*American Negro Slavery* vii ; *Life and Labor* xx) and they were left understudied and unpublished until Greenwood Press published them in 1972. In that same year, the historian Eugene Genovese used them to explore the position of the enslaved in his book *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

focused on Pickens Tartt's interview with Amy Chapman (1843-1938) titled 'De Maste's Good But Oberseer's Mean' (fig. 1.9). Brown and Taylor noted that Chapman was a good friend of Pickens Tartt. Chapman told Pickens Tartt about her parents Bob and Clary Chapman and the brutality of the domestic slave trade. Both her parents were from Virginia and 'dey was driv' down to Alabamy lak cattle an Marse Reuben bought 'em.'

(RPT\_Box8\_F3\_0005) According to Amy Chapman, Reuben Chapman had many enslaved people and several plantations, yet he lived with his wife and children in his house in Huntsville, employing several overseers. She described in detail the torturous behaviour of these malicious and violent overseers without mentioning their names. She shared with Pickens Tartt how one of them viciously brutalised and beat her older brother, and violently undressed her and hit her naked body (65). The other one used to beat Black women 'like crazy' (65). She indicated that she had been chased by dogs, a fascinating detail that most likely reveals that she had tried to escape.

Brown and Taylor located Chapman's nephew, Robert Chapman, who affirmed that most of the details of Chapman's life as written in this document by Pickens Tartt were true, but that they were recorded in an almost incidental manner. Furthermore, he expressed his frustration at the fact that she had omitted the report of his aunt's rape 'by her old marser' as he explained (20). 'De Maste's Good But Oberseer's Mean' consists of accounts of violent actions by the overseer, and Chapman was quoted as saying that she had no husband, and added 'I even forget who was de pappy of some of dese chilluns of mine' (17). It was the first time that this narrative was published in print, and one can only guess that it was Brown and Taylor who brought this testimony to the nephew's attention.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The *Slave Narratives* were digitised in 2001, before which they were available only on microfiche at the Library of Congress. Until their digitisation, out of the 2,300 narratives a few hundred testimonies were published in various publications.



Pickens Tartt's collection includes eight different documents that she wrote about Chapman, bearing witness to what she heard from her. Each one of these documents is several pages longer than 'De Maste's Good But Oberseer's Mean'. They provide an extended and much more harrowing accounts of Chapman's life story through her clear and poignant words. The gap between these recollections and the exchange between these two women is inexplicably missing from 'De Maste's Good But Oberseer's Mean'. The rape account which is absent from this text, does appear in others and is described explicitly in another formal document that Pickens Tartt had submitted to the *Life Histories Project* (1937-1938). Based on the fact that she successfully recorded detailed testimonies from various formerly enslaved people and dedicated several documents to Chapman's story that she defined as akin to 'the worst pages of Harriet Beecher Stowe', it seems unlikely that she chose to omit this detail from Chapman's life (RPT\_Box8\_F4\_0006). Pickens Tartt indicated that an overseer named Hewey Leman was the father of Chapman's children and she recorded Chapman's rape testimony: 'I didn't want dat man, but he wuz de overseer an he beat me till I had ter have him- twarn't nuthin else ter do' (RPT\_Box8\_F4\_0006). It is unclear why Brown and Taylor ignored those accounts which were available in Pickens Tartt's collection in the LoC archive, and were published in *Toting the Lead Row* more than a decade before their publication.

Chapman's recollection of the rape by the overseer is hard to read, as are most of the things she shared with Pickens Tartt. In Pickens Tartt's collection, one can find a four-page document containing fragments of Chapman's memories that reveal the acts of terror she had to endure as an enslaved woman. 'I can tell you things about slavery times that could make your blood boil, but they's too terrible. I just try to forget' (RPT\_Box8\_F3\_0006). Some of these accounts were woven once again into Pickens Tartt's text for the *Life Histories Project*, titled 'Amy Chapman Funeral.'<sup>37</sup> Pickens Tartt did not hesitate to repeat (and submit)

---

<sup>37</sup> There are three variations of Amy Chapman Funeral – one at the Library of Congress and two other versions at the Pickens Tartt Collection in Livingston.

Chapman's story once again, so that it would be heard. She informed the readers that the overseer was married and his wife knew about these rapes, which made her complicit in the crimes. Pickens Tartt noted that 'the couple took two of the children into their home to live with them, Mr. Leman averring that since the scandal was out anyhow, he might as well own them!' (Pickens Tartt 'Amy Chapman Funeral' 3). Pickens Tartt described how Chapman was forced to nurse this woman when she fell ill and until her death: 'One wonders about the Lemans – what curious compulsions, what distorted forces of the human psyche motivated Hewey Leman?' (Pickens Tartt 'Amy Chapman Funeral' 3). Such comments were not that common in these accounts, nor were they encouraged.

The eight-page manuscript of Chapman's funeral that was submitted to the *Life Histories Project* is both ordinary and extraordinary. Ironically, its essence in the mundane, and the marginal nature of both its location (a small town in the rural South) and its main protagonist, were becoming common characteristics at that time and within such initiatives. This interest in the margins or in the 'Forgotten Men' was prioritised, shaped and designed by the US government's political and ideological agenda.<sup>38</sup> It was backed by the realisation of an extensive and immediate social and economic relief policy that was translated into dozens of programmes and initiatives, implemented between 1933 and 1938 in order to deal with the growing effects of the Great Depression. However, its exceptional and less common value lays in its intimate complexity which unveils itself gradually throughout its eight pages. 'Aunt Amy Chapman, one of the oldest citizens of Sumter County [and certainly one of the most respected of its colored people, passed away] died<sup>39</sup>. Although she had reached the age of ninety-five, Aunt Amy was irremediably young, possessing a vigor of body and mind far

---

<sup>38</sup> On April 7, 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a campaign speech on the radio addressing his approach to the economic crisis, stressing his emphasis on the usually invisible members of society: 'These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rests upon the forgotten, the unorganised but the indispensable units of economic power, for plans like those of 1917 that build from bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid' (Roosevelt).

<sup>39</sup> The text appear in brackets was deleted with a black line at the version kept in the library of congress.

beyond her years. She was truly one of the few that “age cannot wither nor custom stale” (RPT\_Box8\_F5\_0001). Pickens Tartt provided a detailed account of Chapman’s burial site, showing awareness of – and making others notice – how entangled were the lives of the enslaved with the enslavers and with the sites of horror and trauma: Chapman was buried where she was enslaved, where she had been working under inhumane conditions, where she was beaten, dehumanised daily, and raped by the overseer on a regular basis. This place was the house and the land of the 13th Governor of Alabama and the pro-slavery politician Reuben Chapman (1779-1882) in Huntsville, five miles from Livingston. It was her request to be buried there, as Pickens Tartt noted. She emphasised that it was her birthplace and wrote ‘here her sister Mary was buried, and here they dug Aunt Amy’s grave, as she had requested, beside Aunt Mary’s. A few steps down the hillside were other graves unmarked, slaves and members of her family’ (RPT\_Box8\_F5\_0001).<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 1.9. Amy Chapman, Age 94. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress

This account is part of the *Life Histories Project* in the Southern States that despite its short life (1938-1939) stood out from similar and earlier initiatives because of its mission. Its goal as articulated by the FWP Regional Director W.T. Couch was to criticise and reject the

---

<sup>40</sup> Chapman’s parents Clary and Bob Chapman were not among those who were buried there as according to Chapman they were both sold before the end of the war. (Pickens Tartt 64)

scholarly analytical approach that was put to use in other federal initiatives: ‘The fact is that when sociologists get such material they generally treat their subjects as abstractions, and while an enormous amount of statistical material is available on tenants, there are not available at the present time in print anywhere as many as one half-dozen accurate case histories of actual tenant farmers’ (‘Memorandum’). Moreover, Couch claimed, ‘The fact that it has not been collected means that the existence of a scholarly discipline which might engage in the collection of such materials had had their attention directed elsewhere’ (‘Memorandum’). Instead, he supposedly offered a different approach that would emerge ‘from a human point of view’ (‘Memorandum’). He insisted on plurality and diversity, as expressed in his decision to collect from all racial groups: ‘We must have life histories that reveal the way people in the South live. And Negro and members of other racial groups are people just as well as whites’ (‘Memorandum’). He requested the inclusion of all types of tenants and almost any type of job one could think of: ‘no one knows anything about elevator boys, waitresses, grocery clerks, Five-and-Ten cent store girls’ or ‘steel mill and coal mining’ (‘Memorandum’). He instructed the agents to ask the interviewees about their occupations, their families, villages and towns but also about landlord-tenant relations, eating habits, health and disease in the South. He truly believed that this project would lead to the creation of a new literary work by introducing source materials for authors and by showing ‘the possibilities of the use of techniques of other disciplines in gathering material’ (‘Memorandum’) – that it would even create ‘a new literary genre’ (‘Memorandum’). The case history technique, he claimed, was not new; it was put to use in many disciplines and among them he mentions psychoanalysis, medicine and social science, ‘but always it has been used to illustrate, to prove or disapprove some point. No one attempted to collect such material purely for its human interest, purely for the value of accurate portrayals of individual

lives' ('Memorandum'). He also noted the need to collect folklore, songs and legends. He envisioned a collection of four to five volumes titled *Life in the South*.

Even within this framework, 'Amy Chapman Funeral' still stands out by virtue of the people involved. For Pickens Tartt, Chapman was no marginal figure, nor was she an abstract subject. She knew Chapman for many years, since both resided in Livingston. Pickens Tartt used to give her lifts from time to time, and she paid her many visits. Chapman took the opportunity to tell her life story again and again, as harsh as it was. 'Dark Was the Night Cold was the Ground' was Chapman's favourite song even though it was a 'white fo'kes song', as she explained to Pickens Tartt before singing it to her. Chapman first heard this song when she was baptised in a place called Jones Creek when it was sung by the white preacher who baptised her. Upon Chapman's request it was sung at her funeral.

Soon the men were again at work with their shovels filling in the grave, while all the Negroes sang together in the wonderful harmony, which is so natural to them, the hymn which had been Aunt Amy's favorites:

Dark wuz the night  
 Cold wuz de groun'  
 On which my Saviour lay  
 Blood in draps en sweat run down  
 In agony he pray.

Lord move dis bitter cup  
 Ef sech Dy sacred will  
 Ef not, content I'll drink hit up  
 Whose pleasure I'll fulfill.

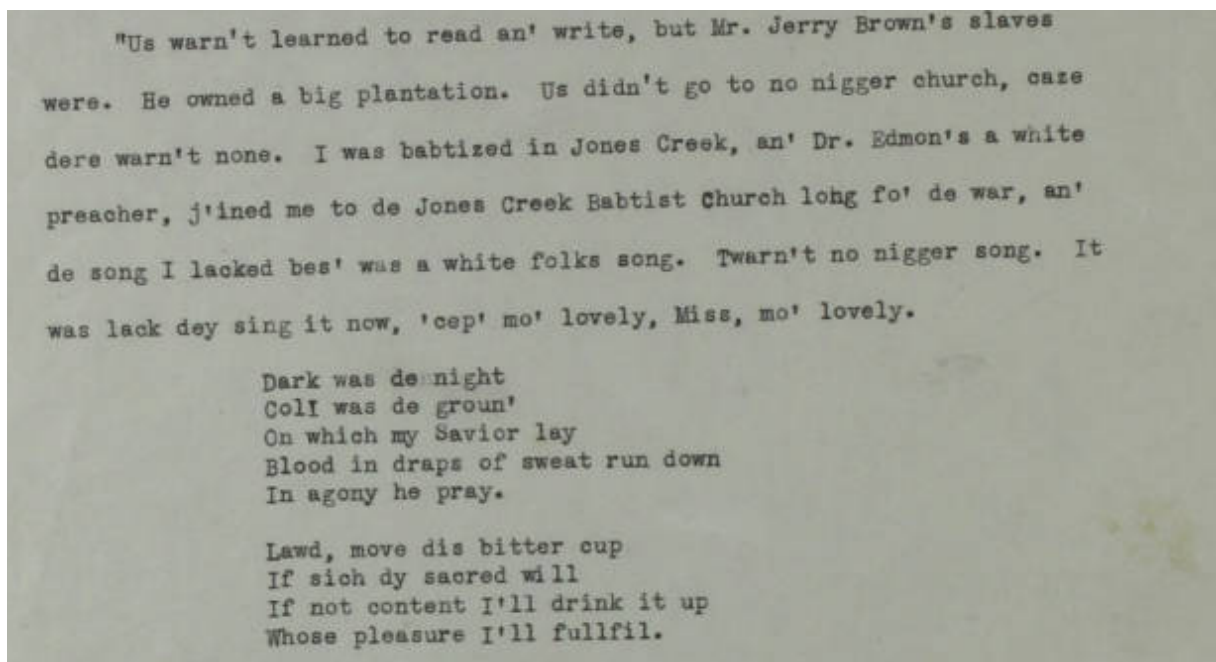


Fig. 1.10. Image (via screenshot) of excerpt of Amy Chapman's testimony titled 'De master good but overseers mean' with the song 'Dark was de night' (RPT\_Box3\_F3\_0006)

Fig. 1.11. Image (via screenshot) of Pickens Tartt's text 'Amy Chapman's Funeral' with the song 'Dark was de night' ('Amy Chapman Funeral')

Pickens Tartt concluded her account in the following way: 'we stood a moment with heads bowed while the preacher pronounced the benediction, then made our way back down the hill and across the peaceful hay fields of Aunt Amy's 'home-place'. She had been returned to the soil from which she had sprung and was one with the land which she had loved so intensely.' As hooks claims, Black women 'believed that the creation of homeplace, however

fragile and tenuous' had a 'radical political dimension' (384). Pickens Tartt's use of the phrase home-place in this account is not incidental, I believe. It is as if Pickens Tartt understood that 'home' would not suffice or would not be accurate, as if she acknowledged the precarity of such place for the enslaved woman and the formerly enslaved, and as a result she recognised Chapman's claim on this place as hers. Her reclamation of this place as her home is in itself an act of resistance.

## Chapter II: ‘And you who walk in humble places, think kindly too, of others’: Zora Neale Hurston’s Practice of Collecting and Archiving as an Act of Care

*‘What do black women and girls need? What does it look like to create a world in which black women and girls can thrive? That should always be the fundamental sort of opening question.’ – Brittney Cooper, 2018*

### Introduction

Within the ongoing conversations surrounding Zora Neale Hurston’s cultural identity, legacy and rightful place within histories which she is (or should be) part of, Hurston is represented as the shining star of the Harlem Renaissance or as the ‘Genius of the South’.<sup>41</sup> Her practice of collecting and her identity as a collector, an archivist and a cataloguer, is too often left out of these histories. Far from being a minor activity in Hurston’s life and literary work, collecting was a fundamental practice that formed the basis of and shaped almost all of her written and creative work, fiction and non-fiction. This chapter focuses on Zora Neale Hurston as a collector: by exploring Hurston’s practices of collecting, it questions and challenges the canonical archival institution that holds her work without recognising her as a collector. I use the term collector for Hurston’s entire body of work, instead of the designated disciplinary appellations which include novelist, playwright, anthropologist, ethnographer and folklorist, in order to position her practice as an independent act of care that was and is crucially relevant to the creative, sonic, experiential and emotional expressions of Black people across the diaspora. In rejecting these narrow disciplinary labels, I contest their power and role in her canonisation and marginalisation alike.

Collecting was Hurston’s greatest passion. She may have even felt that collecting was her duty or mission. Evidence of this sense of duty can be uncovered across the early stages of her life (and career) through to its end.<sup>42</sup> Three years before her death, when her health was

---

<sup>41</sup> This phrase is taken from the tombstone which Alice Walker put in place after locating Hurston’s unmarked grave.

<sup>42</sup> Hurston opened the introduction to *Mules and Men* (1935) by stating how glad she was when 'somebody told me, "You may go and collect Negro folklore"' (this quote has often been ascribed to her Columbia professor of



deteriorating, Hurston, who worked as a librarian struggling to cover her medical bills, wrote to folklorist Alan Lomax: ‘No, I am not hinting for an invitation, but you know how I love collecting’ (Hurston ‘Letter to Alan Lomax’). Her collection reflects and illuminates the lived experiences and interiority of African Americans and African Caribbean individuals and communities in the United States and the Caribbean. As a collector, Hurston was constantly on the move and in communicative exchange with others. Every encounter yielded something – a song, a taste, a story, a rumour, a folk tale, a dance, a religious sermon or ritual, or even a gesture – which informed and fashioned the themes within her eminent and rich body of work. This work evolved through the stories of the lives of Black people to explore candidly and unequivocally the effects and after-effects of slavery, the working conditions of labourers, the impact of the Great Migration and the intense feelings of love, longing and pride experienced by many in Black communities.

The neglect of Hurston’s practice as a collector of song and music is a grave historical omission and, most importantly, an institutional failure. The omission has its root in the positioning of the roles of African American collectors in the segregated United States. African American collectors were often defined as insider-outsiders, confined to this position by different institutions of knowledge and the various academic disciplines that shaped collection as a practice and the collector as a position of authority: anthropology, ethnography and ethnomusicology. The liminal position of the insider-outsider is a central component of what I propose is a dual practice of ‘courtship and exclusion’. This practice was mostly carried out by white individuals and institutions at national and state levels who sought the kind of access which African American collectors had to Black individuals and communities – people who

---

Anthropology, Franz Boas). She then added: ‘In a way it would not be a new experience to me’ (18) clarifying how familiar she was with this practice from a young age. In the first chapter, she told the people at Eatonville that she came to collect their stories and, sensing their astonishment, she emphasised the essential nature of these stories and indeed her mission: ‘They are a lot more valuable than you might think. We want to set them down before it’s too late... Before everybody forgets all of ‘em’ (18).

often rejected or avoided the queries and curiosities of white collectors, or even tricked them. While white collectors did want access to Black communities and their cultural production, these collectors actively excluded Hurston and her African American contemporaries and limited their paths to the securing of stable, authoritative and central positions as collectors. Black women, as Patricia Hill Collins argues, were (and still are) more exposed than Black men to such practices of exclusion.<sup>43</sup> Existing scholarship explores Hurston's insider-outsider position as an integral part of her practice. Less attention has been paid to how her liminal status was perceived and used as a tool by other people, and to how it influenced the structural inequalities that prevailed at social and institutional levels (Johnson 'Threshold of Difference' 278–89). Consequently, not enough scholarly attention has been paid to how Hurston's positionality affected the inscription of her sonic contribution as a collector in various archives and historiographies of collecting.

The questioning of the nature of the archive and the modes of being inscribed in it lies at the heart of this chapter. It examines both Hurston's practice as a collector and the relationship of her practice to institutions and dominant figures in the field of collecting. I focus on a singular event of recording as a case study. This recording session took place in Jacksonville, Florida, in the summer of 1939 while Hurston was working for the Federal Writers' Project (FWP). I find this session exceptional, because Hurston herself was also being recorded, and it is a prime opportunity to explore the contours of her practice. In the session, Hurston introduced and performed the songs she collected and was interviewed by Herbert Halpert and Stetson Kennedy. Her dual position as collector and performer was at the core of the event and its aftermath. Hurston, I argue, was keenly aware of the potency of this moment,

---

<sup>43</sup> Collins' focus is academia, yet she also addresses the culture at large in the ways it devalues Black women's knowledge and authority: 'One way of excluding the majority of Black Women from the knowledge-validation process is to permit a few Black women to acquire positions of authority in the institutions that legitimate knowledge and to encourage them to work within the taken-for-granted assumption of Black female inferiority shared by the scholarly community and the culture at large' ('The Social Construction' 753).

iterating her authority through the recording. Yet, her authority was overruled when the event was not catalogued under her name as a collector, but instead was added to the national archive of the New Deal as another artefact, with Hurston classified as a performer. If we listen carefully to this recording and juxtapose it with the way it has been classified, it becomes clear that Hurston's intellectual capital and experience were exploited, taken for granted, and incorporated into a dominant meta-narrative of the FWP and the New Deal ideology. Hurston's assimilation into an archival project controlled and managed mainly by white men amounts to an appropriation and a distortion of her voice and participation. Myron M. Beasley addresses the consequences of this kind of assimilation and the denial of authoritative positionality within the archive. Despite the fact that most of Hurston's recordings in the LoC are digitised, it is hard to find them (Beasley 59). Hurston's recordings are dispersed and held under other people's collections at the LoC, mainly in the files of white male collectors such as the Alan Lomax Collection or the Herbert Halpert Collection. In order to explore the range and significance of Hurston's work, one must 'contemplate the race and gender cultural politics of her time and now, in the twenty-first century', as Beasley notes (59).

These historical conditions entailed a twofold marginalisation: the first concerns Hurston's biography and scholarly attention to her sonic work; the second relates to the FWP and the historiography of folklore and collecting traditions. Anne duCille, Daphne A. Brooks, Pamela Bordelon and Sonnet Retman, amongst others, creatively overcame the many obstacles in the way of accessing the scattered presence of Hurston's sonic work in various archives, as well as clarifying the misleading information regarding her roles and contribution. They found ways to amplify Hurston's voice. Yet much of the work published thus far has focused on Hurston's dual position as a collector-informant and on either her participant observation methodology which was part of what Retman calls a 'signifying ethnography' (158-9) or, alternatively, on the performative qualities of Hurston's work and methods and the

interrelatedness of both. However, the event of recording itself was left in the background of these scholars' examinations. In the context of the FWP and the historiography of folksong collecting, this recording session is painfully absent.

This chapter draws on Black feminist thought and the concepts of rage and anger as productive forces which were intrinsic to Hurston's acts of care. These concepts contribute to my analysis of the 1939 recording session as well as to the broader understanding of Hurston's role as a collector. The chapter provides a close (but also, at times, deliberately peripheral) reading/listening of the 1939 recording session alongside additional sources related to the event drawn from the written recollections of its participants, official and internal memos, and correspondence. It reveals that the forms of domination and exploitation by the patriarchy were deeply structured, and shows how the conditions in which FWP actors performed their collecting served to impact on Black voices and dictate how they were inscribed in the archive.<sup>44</sup> These inscriptions have not been changed since these recordings entered the archive. Moreover, they were shaped as untouchable original inscriptions and they require a critical reading *of* and *against* the archive as a point of departure for new interpretations. My methods of reading against the archive have been informed mainly by Saidiya Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) which defines the process as a 'combination of foraging and disfiguration-raiding for fragments upon which other narratives can be spun and misshaping and deforming the testimony through selective quotation and the amplification of issues germane to this study' (11-12). Hartman's methods enable further space for interpretation and even a degree of speculation that is still responsible for the archival document: 'write a different account of the past, while realizing the limits imposed by employing these sources' (11-12). Such methodology also assists the dialectic endeavour of this chapter: to identify mechanisms of

---

<sup>44</sup> It is vital to clarify that I oppose patriarchal domination by quoting Patricia Hill Collins's statement: 'African American women have been neither passive victims of nor willing accomplices to their own domination' ('The Social Construction' 747).

oppression while amplifying the multiple forms of resistance practised by Hurston and by many of the scholars committed to discussing the defiance of her voice. This recording session, I argue, is an opportunity to overcome Hurston's second marginalisation – the institutional one. In this direction, I position this recording session as an interview with *a collector* about her own practice of collecting. This recording is therefore one of the earliest existing recordings of a collector, and one of the first occasions where a collector was interviewed by a fellow collector.

### **Statement of Responsibility, Embodied Archive, Explicit and Implicit Rage**

'My name is Zora Neale Hurston, I was born in Eatonville, Florida, I'm 35 years old' stated Hurston, for the record, at the office of the Federal Writers' Project in Florida, before her rendition of the song 'Gonna See My Long-Haired Babe'. Hurston's voice bursts abruptly out of the screeching noise made by the scratches on the acetate disk on which it was originally recorded.<sup>45</sup> Simple informative sentences of this kind were common to the thousands of audio recordings that were made at that time for the various federal initiatives, from the different sections of the FWP to the Folk Music Project. They were known as 'Statements of Responsibility' which informants and interviewees were asked to say loudly and clearly at the beginning or end of recordings.<sup>46</sup> In Hurston's case, however, this cannot be interpreted as just an ordinary part of a routine. It framed her as an informant rather than introduce her as a scholar, collector and curator. The positioning of Hurston as an informant who was required to read a statement of responsibility was itself an evocative statement made by her colleagues and supervisor. The decision demarcates the boundaries of Hurston's permitted position within the

---

<sup>45</sup> The quality of the sound is explained on the Florida Memory website: 'these disks were shipped from Washington DC to Florida, then to the recording site, and then back to Washington, these disks often were not of the highest sonic quality. Several had surface scratches and many had various recording speeds.' (Hurston *WPA Field Recordings*).

<sup>46</sup>Statement of responsibility (245 ‡c). For RDA (2.4.1.1), the statement of responsibility for the title properly identifies the persons, families or corporate bodies (i.e. groups like the Beatles) who were 'responsible for the creation of, or contributing to the realization of, the intellectual or artistic content of a resource' (see Yale University Library, 'Cataloging of Popular & Traditional Music Sound Recordings').

FWP’s racial hierarchy when other, white male, collectors were present. Based on this statement read by Hurston and in effect made by her supervisors, Hurston is labelled in the LoC archive as a ‘performer’ and ‘speaker’ (fig. 2.1), and in the Florida Memory section of the State Library and Archives of Florida as a ‘tradition bearer’. It is worth emphasising that Kennedy and Halpert, who were both younger and considerably less experienced than Hurston, were each given the title of ‘Collector’ in the context of this recording. This division of labour, rearticulated and reinscribed in the archive, replicated Hurston’s position as a mediator, an insider-outsider who is characterised either as a ‘native’ or an ‘informant’ or possibly as a ‘subject’, but not as an authoritative collector.

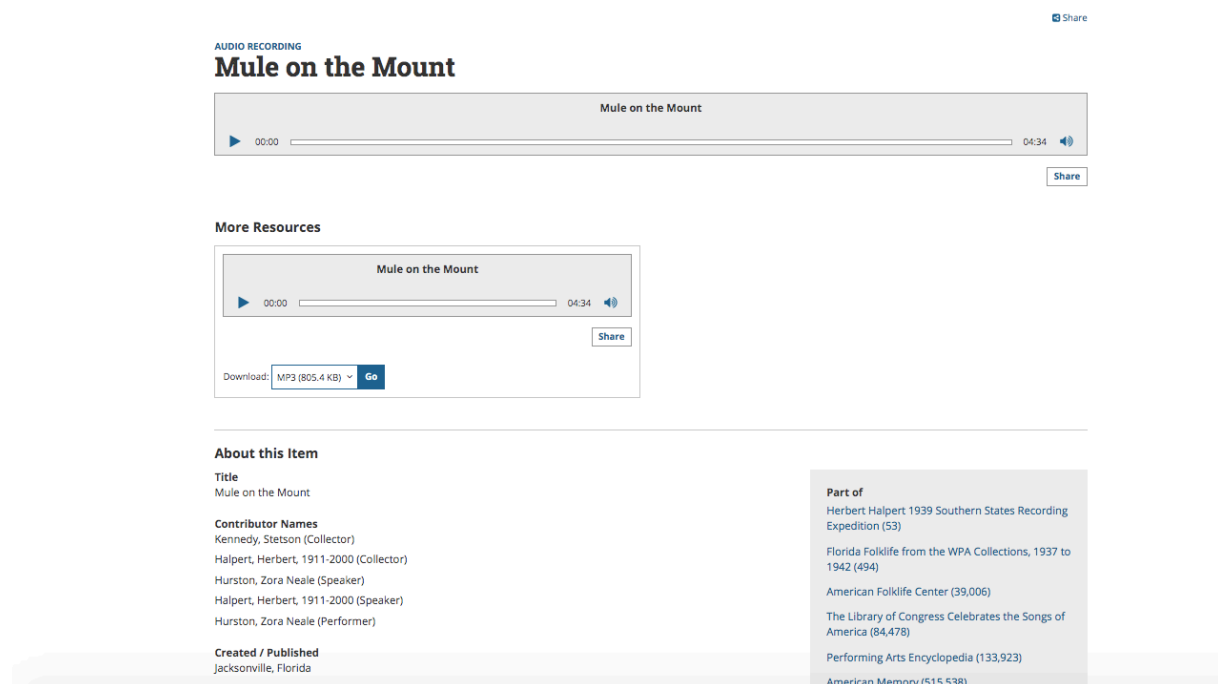


Fig. 2.1. Image (via screenshot) of Library of Congress catalogue entry for audio recording ‘Mule on the Mount’, listing names and roles of Contributors.

However, the story does not end here. Hurston was accustomed to standing on the other side, as the interviewer equipped with a notebook and a pencil, so she understood perfectly the potentiality of agency enfolded at this moment. When we listen to her voice and pay attention to the details of her statement, we understand that she seized her chance to ensure that her words were recorded in order to register her legacy and tell her story as she wished it to be told –

without risking it being altered or edited, as often occurred in her written work for the FWP at the hands of her white supervisors.<sup>47</sup> Referring to this recording session, Daphne A. Brooks writes that ‘the Zora who surfaces... actively theorizes her own phonographic project’ (‘Sister’ 623). Hurston, she argues, used ‘embodied and sounded performances as a tool of ethnographic inscription, as an instrument that might put black voices on the (scholarly) record’ (623). Building on Brooks’s argument, I suggest that Hurston not only found a way to ensure the Black voices she encountered became part of a scholarly record, but she also asserted her own voice as an authority. Catherine A. Stewart writes about the wider context of African Americans’ involvement in the FWP, claiming that ‘Black intellectuals were becoming increasingly committed to (re) constructing a historical record that would foster a sense of collective pride and national identity, while educating white Americans about black achievements and entitlement to the rights of citizenship’ (2). Writing African American history into the nation’s master narrative, she claims, generated hope which ‘could serve as the foundation for achieving racial equality’ (2). Hurston’s wish that people should ‘know what real Negro music sounded like’ must be treated as part of this collective effort (Hurston, ‘Concert’, 804).

The facts, nonetheless, contradict Hurston’s declaration in her statement of responsibility. She was not born in Eatonville, but rather in Notasulga, Alabama; not in 1903 but fourteen years earlier in 1891. Her family moved to Eatonville, one of the first self-governing all-Black municipalities in the United States, when she was three years old. Her formative experiences were in Eatonville, but more importantly it was the town’s unique setting as an enclave of autonomy which shaped her political worldview, her pride, and her love for

---

<sup>47</sup> Stetson Kennedy validated the effects of racism on the editorial process, though his insistence that both sides were equally affected is problematic and blind to the different positions of the two groups: ‘Jim Crow kept watch over the shoulders of white and black alike’ (11), adding that it gave ‘rise to varying degree of pejorative and paternalism on pages produced by the former and sometime deference and ingratiation in the pages of the latter’ (11). He referred to it as a ‘job insurance for both studies’ (11).

Black cultural heritage.<sup>48</sup> Hurston's decision to state Eatonville as her place of birth reflects the town's unique significance for African Americans during the violent and racist period of the post-reconstruction era in the South. It speaks to the possibility of a Black identity that is not shaped merely as a negation of or an opposition to white people and white rule.<sup>49</sup> On several occasions Hurston was inconsistent about her age. Her need to obscure her age testifies to the struggle she had to become educated and find employment outside of the limited options usually reserved for African American women. When she had the chance to go back to school, Hurston did not hesitate to pretend that she was much younger. Hurston was twenty-seven when she completed high school.

Carla Cappetti argues that rage was essential to Hurston's endurance in a world which hindered her ability to thrive, but presents this as only one thread of Hurston's multi-layered personality. Cappetti notes that rage makes Hurston 'a far more human being than we allow her to be', therefore accentuating the cost of the disavowal of rage (604). The consideration and theorisation of rage is an essential component of my effort to situate Hurston's participation in this recording within the wider context of her writings on racism, and specifically the context of white collectors where her rage is substantially explicit. Correspondingly, it is crucial to amplify another layer of this recording session in which Hurston skilfully negotiated the power relation at play by insisting on reclaiming her position as a collector. Though she had many reasons to feel rage and anger, Hurston did not outwardly express either of these emotions towards her white questioners Herbert Halpert and Stetson Kennedy. However, I assert that it should not be interpreted that anger was absent from the recording of this event. Hurston's refusal to show her anger can be regarded as, in Therí A. Pickens' words, 'the refusal to manifest

---

<sup>48</sup> On her first intentional collecting trip, Hurston set out to Eatonville and 'knew that the town was full of material' (Hurston *Mules and Men* 2).

<sup>49</sup> Hurston emphasised the uniqueness of Eatonville in the segregated South: 'I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town.' She proudly noted that the town was 'the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America' (Hurston *Dust Tracks On A Road* 2).



anger in the public sphere' (21). In *Mules and Men*, published four years before this recording session, Hurston wrote about a similar exchange with a white questioner, which I suggest can be read as an anticipation of such situation:

the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!". We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing [...] The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. (4-5)

This statement, read alongside the recording, sheds new light on the 'double consciousness' of her participation in the recording, to borrow from Du Bois. It allows us to see that her refusal to show anger could be described as a strategic decision.

Aside from establishing and studying the radical and empowering concepts of anger, rage and refusal in Hurston's collecting work, it is important to emphasise that 'Black women are never only angry' not only to address historical stereotypes, but to make room for what Brittney Cooper describes as 'the reclamation of Black women's full emotional lives' (Cooper 'Harnessing'). The reading of Hurston's work and role of collector, as expounded in this chapter, situates the manifestation of anger and rage as intrinsic to and inseparable from her practice of care which is expressed in her collecting and curating practice. Black rage, as Cornel West suggests, is linked to an intense love for Black people (136). The meaning of the term curator (deriving from the Latin word *cura*) is useful for understanding Hurston's practice because the term accounts for the way she assembled and organised what she collected. It is also relevant to Hurston's mode of attending to and taking care of what she collected. As a designation it also seeks to challenge Hurston's image and position within American Studies which hegemonically depicts her as a prominent Harlem Renaissance 'genius' who performed as a chic and flamboyant character for her Jazz Age peers.<sup>50</sup> This image neglects and

---

<sup>50</sup> An example can be found in Valerie Boyd's text 'She Was the Party' which takes its title from a recollection in which Sterling Brown once said: 'When Zora was there, she was the party.'. Boyd writes 'Lest anyone forget her, Hurston made a wholly memorable entrance at a party following the awards dinner. She strode into the room - jammed with writers and arts patrons, black and white - and flung a long, richly colored scarf around her neck

overshadows her other important qualities which may have been less alluring to the processes of canon formation, such as her own investment, sensitivity and care at the centre of her collecting practice.<sup>51</sup> Hurston cared for the people she met and collected from. She cared about their songs and stories, and she cared enough to ensure other people were able to hear them. In Hurston's own words, 'Was the real voice of my people never to be heard?' (Hurston 'Concert' 804).

Brooks offers an invaluable contribution to this recording session which illuminates Hurston's sonic performance and allows me to advance a radical reading of her vocal recording and performative practice. She defines Hurston as 'A voice of the people. An archive of folk sound.' (623). Brooks' radical reading of Hurston as 'an archive of folk sound' is crucial to my argument as it lays the ground for my articulation of Hurston's unique methodologies. Inspired by Brooks and Retman, I refer to Hurston's practice as an 'embodied archive' because she was collecting and inscribing songs through a consideration of how they interact with her body. It was through memorising and performing lyrics, rhythms, breathing patterns and other gestures that Hurston's archive was formed. Moreover, Brooks acknowledges Hurston as a legitimate auspice for these songs and credits her with the authority and capability of providing care for these songs as well as for the people and stories behind them. The content of the recording I focus on, alongside Hurston's embodied archive, undermines its current classification. The notion of an embodied archive demands that we approach the data and historical records as though they are authored and performed by Hurston's body and voice, and according to her

---

with a dramatic flourish as she bellowed a reminder of the title of her winning play: "Colooooooooo Struuckkkk!". Her exultant entrance literally stopped the party for a moment, just as she had intended. In this way, Hurston made it known that a bright and powerful presence had arrived.' (Boyd *She Was the Party*).

<sup>51</sup> In her 2017 essay 'Decolonizing the Curatorial', André Lepecki draws from postcolonial theory and critical Black studies to rethink curatorial practices. One of the models she offers (with the intention of rethinking Lygia Clark's art) is fruitful with regard to Hurston's work as a collector and as an embodied archive. This model objects to the neoliberal economy of the national archive with which her collection then was assimilated: 'In this new alogical mode of curating, instead of objects (including performance) and experiences (of performance) we would have instead *things* and *vivências* the term used by Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica to describe the lived experience of experimentation, always linked to both action and speech' (Lepecki 108).

terms. This allows me to further demonstrate how the wider context of this event and its inscription in the archives encapsulates the way racism and its technologies of segregation and discrimination determined every aspect of life, including movement, the organisation and division of space, employment, pay policies, and social behaviours. Most importantly, this event as an embodied archive provides a case study which argues for the urgency of identifying the less visible or unaccounted-for effects of segregation, and the strategies of negotiation and improvisation required from Black actors.

The recording session ran for approximately forty-five minutes and consists of eighteen audio tracks in which Hurston introduced various songs that she had collected during different periods of her life. She provided invaluable information about the origins and sites where they were performed. Pamela Bordelon claims that this recording session provides a rare insight into Hurston's 'perceptions of her collecting and presentation of herself as a folklorist' (Bordelon *Go Gator* 46).<sup>52</sup> Bordelon also notes that these songs reveal 'a great deal about Hurston's folklore field collecting experience' and that Hurston's selections 'showcase those she believed most representative of Florida black folks' life, work and recreation' (Bordelon *Go Gator* 157). Bordelon highlights the importance of Hurston's focus on both work and play songs, as they 'tell us what life was like for Florida's African American laborers during the early decades of the twentieth century' (158). The first song she sang was collected in 1930 from a man named Max Ford who was part of a construction gang working for the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC). Following a short introduction, Hurston cleared her throat before commencing her singing. I interpret Hurston's gesture of clearing her throat as part of a careful staging of her embodied archive. Hurston produced a sound that resembles the mechanical action of switching mode. This action enabled her to pause her speech, performing a kind of ceremonial introduction before she dived deep into her (re)collection. She sourced the right track, pulled it

---

<sup>52</sup> The publication includes the full transcripts of the recording session.

back up, and played it by the force of her voice, re-enacting the lining song and actions. Beasley focused on the song ‘Let the Deal Go Down’, a gambling song, as a representative example of Hurston’s embodiment. In this song, he writes, ‘Hurston rehashes the folkloric tale, and then she explicates how the song is literally performed as she embodies several characters sitting around a table to give the audience a real sense of the context’ (Beasley 55-6).

Hurston’s singing in this recording sounds both effortless and effortful. There seems to be a gap between her familiarity with the songs – the lyrics, their pronunciation, the beat – and her imperfect voice, which I find to be somewhat beautiful but which cannot keep up with the musical challenge. It seems, at times, that she struggles to recapture in her voice the sounds she must have heard and registered so clearly in her embodied archive. Brooks described Hurston’s technical imperfections as ‘bold and pronounced in the realm of singing yet delivered with clarion confidence and simmering delight’ (618). Brooks writes that Hurston sings like ‘an amateur karaoke singer who revels in the song itself while ignoring the missed notes...’ (618). The sound of the recording, combined with Brooks’s vivid depictions, reinforces my desire to have an additional glimpse into this rare and intimate moment – a photograph or at least more fulsome description of the event by its participants.

Songs, as Hurston explained in the recording, were an instrumental aspect of the work process: ‘A whole crew of men singing at one time, and the railroad has to pay the singing liner or else the men won’t work.’ (Hurston, ‘Gonna See’). Working on the railroad construction was harsh, dangerous work that was often carried out under exploitative conditions – work which white workers, even those in need of employment, had the option to avoid (Pozzetta 704). Convict leasing was common in the Southern States following the passing of the Black Codes and vagrancy laws at the end of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth-century. These laws led to the imprisonment of many Black men who were then sentenced to labour for the smallest charges. This system was considered especially violent in the state of

Florida where the Florida East Coast Railway relied on and benefited from it (McCarthy 23, Bowman & Forde). This context is pertinent to my interpretation of the song ‘Gonna see my long-haired babe’; some of its lyrics express both an interior reflection (a relationship, maybe love) and anticipation:

Gonna see my long-haired babe,  
Gonna see my long-haired babe,  
Oh, Lawd I’m goin’ cross the water,  
See my long-haired babe. (Hurston, ‘Gonna See’)<sup>53</sup>

Other fragments of the lyrics reflect on the actual reality in situ concerning work, boss and pay:

What you reckon Mr. Treadwell said to Mr. Goff  
Lawd I believe I’ll go south pay them poor boys off.

Another song that Hurston performed for the recording, ‘Halimuhfack’, has a mixture of what Brooks beautifully describes as a ‘playful and flirtatious energy’ and ‘melancholic lyrics’ that signal ‘lapsed love, abrupt departures, and the sting of abandonment’ (622). Hurston explained in the recording that she learned the song one evening from a crowd somewhere on the East Coast. In the LoC archive, the song’s entry has the following subject headings: African Americans, Bawdy Songs, United States – Florida – Duval County – Jacksonville. By listening to the source – Hurston’s embodied archive – we can access richer details than these archive subject headings suggest. Brooks’s interpretation, for example, rejects its classification as merely a bawdy song and expands its reading within the context of Black experiences of the Great Migration and the Depression era. Brooks suggests that the song ‘captured the entwined sound of collective play and individual despair as well as steely determination in the face of turbulent change’ (622).

---

<sup>53</sup> The chorus goes ‘Oh Lula! Oh Gal! Want to see you so bad.’ (Hurston, ‘Gonna See’).

### **Courtship and Exclusion – Making Allowances**

If we consider Hurston's practice of collecting as part of the broader history of her employment and the roles Hurston was assigned within various federal initiatives, we uncover a dual pattern that I term *courtship* and *exclusion*. This pattern was orchestrated by the racialised and gendered structures on which the employing organisation was premised and is grounded in a particular history. It cannot be separated from our understanding of the consequences of the Jim Crow laws. Eric Lott describes the way dual patterns articulate racial differences by 'drawing up and crossing racial boundaries' (6). Although Lott focuses primarily on minstrel performance, his analysis is insightful with regard to other forms of white consumption of Black performance and entertainment. Lott suggests that the 1930s reclamation of 'folk' is similar to minstrelsy because it associates 'blackness' with the 'people's culture' (6-7). He argues that such a pattern of desire and repulsion was at the centre of the minstrelsy performance and symptomatic of the era. It was embedded in the processes of marking racial differences and acts of subjugation and exploitation. In the context of the Jim Crow era, with its strict policies effecting racial separation and control, any institutional relationship (even 'do good' initiatives like the FWP) nonetheless operated within the limits of this historical tradition.

Hurston was first employed by the newly formed 'Negro Unit' of the WPA's Federal Theatre Projects in New York in October 1935 (Boyd *Wrapped in Rainbows* 278). She was hired as a drama coach for \$23.66 per week.<sup>54</sup> By that time Hurston had already proved herself as a prolific writer. She had written several plays and theatrical revues, and her articles and essays had been published in a variety of journals and magazines such as *Opportunity*, *Forum*, *Messenger*, *Ebony*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Journal of Negro History* and in Nancy Cunard's anthology *Negro*. Her first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* was published in 1934. Soon

---

<sup>54</sup> This was 'less than the \$100 a month she'd received, briefly, for her work on the Lomax-Barnicle expedition, and far less than the \$200 a month she'd collected from Godmother [Charlotte Osgood Mason] starting in 1928' (Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 319).

afterwards, in the same month that she was hired by the FTP, she published her second book *Mules and Men* (1935) which won her much praise and recognition and positioned her as a skilful fieldworker and narrator of African American lore.

In his review of *Mules and Men* published in *New Republic*, Henry Lee Moon wrote the following about Hurston: ‘Alert and observant, she studied the mores, folkways and superstitions, the social and economic life of these people as an essential background for her book’ (10). Moon drew attention to the intimacy Hurston established with her subjects, an intimacy that she then ‘reproduces on the printed page, enabling the reader to feel himself a part of that circle’ (10). The anthropologist Melville Herskovitz wrote of this quality in his recommendation letter for Hurston’s Guggenheim application the following year: ‘I think it is not saying too much to state that Miss Hurston probably has a more intimate knowledge than anyone in this country’ (Boyd *Wrapped in Rainbows* 285). This intimacy testifies not only to her unique abilities as a collector but also to the relationships she had with the people from whom she collected, in which a high level of mutual trust and respect was key. Hurston, according to Boyd, ‘offered a glimpse of what black southern life was like when white people weren’t watching’ (322). This is central to understanding Hurston’s position and relationship with the FWP. Her work and abilities (as shown in *Mules and Men*) appealed to the white institution’s desire to have access to the spaces and experiences that Hurston was admitted to. The institution’s mission to diversify, advance and document the marginalised was at odds with its other mission: to reproduce white monopoly over Black people and their resources. Using Hurston to achieve an intimate access to ‘the people’, the institution adopted and inflated the goals (and methods) articulated by pioneers of ethnography and anthropology such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Hurston’s Columbia University professor Franz Boas. These scholars advocated an advanced participant observation approach with the goal of ‘grasp[ing]

the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world' (Malinowski 25), while often pushing the ethical boundaries of these intimate encounters.

Parallel to her creative work, Hurston also pursued an academic career. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Barnard College in 1928. In January of 1935 she began her graduate studies in Anthropology at Columbia University with a fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation. In March of the same year Hurston was promoted by FTP to a senior research worker position. However, an alternative pathway emerged when she was awarded the Guggenheim fellowship and provided with twice the salary of the WPA role. By all parameters, this was a better deal and she left her position at the FWP to do anthropological fieldwork in Jamaica and Haiti.<sup>55</sup> In 1938, when Hurston left Harlem and settled in Eatonville to concentrate on her writing and complete her manuscript based on her work in the Caribbean, *Tell My Horse* (1938), she was approached by the FWP to work as consultant for *The Florida Negro* project. She declined the offer stating that she did not have the time to take on further work (Boyd *Wrapped in Rainbows* 359). It was only when her Guggenheim grant came to its end that she reconsidered the offer and despite her credentials and experience (by then she had already published her third book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in 1937) she had no choice but to take a junior interviewer role at a low salary of \$63 per month working for the Florida State Guide, for which she had to certify that she was in need of relief pay. As Bordelon claims in *Go Gator and the Muddy Water* (1999), the humiliation Hurston felt at being on 'relief' pay in a junior role 'cannot be overemphasized' and represents a 'clear-cut case of racial discrimination' (Bordelon *Go Gator* 14-5).

In 1935, soon after being appointed as FWP state director, Dr. Carita Doggett Corse urged national FWP officials to create a separate unit that would be run by African Americans. Corse wanted Hurston to be in charge, stating 'we feel that a State-Wide Negro Project under

---

<sup>55</sup> This grant provided her with year-long financial support to study West Indian Obeah practices in the Caribbean.



Zora Hurston would be of *great value*' (Stewart 176) [italics added]. Corse described this value in her letter: 'as you realize little cooperation could be expected in this section from a white district under a negro supervisor or vice versa' (176), adding that 'At a federal level, there was increasing support for 'Negro units' that could *penetrate* and record the curiously visible yet closed black communities within the southern states' (176) [italics added]. Rather than questioning the invasiveness involved in 'penetrating' these 'closed black communities', Corse sought ways to overcome this communal refusal so that the project could benefit from the labour of Black people without recognising them as peers. Neither at this point nor during any later opportunities was Hurston appointed to a supervisory role or given any such responsibility. However, Corse began to refer to Hurston as the 'Negro editor' and 'supervisor of the Negro Unit' in correspondence to and from the Washington office, although it was Stetson Kennedy who was formally put in charge as editor (Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 363). Stewart emphasises the irony in the fact that the NWU (Negro Writers' Units) grew out of the segregated society in Florida, but helped guarantee African American involvement and constituted 'one of the few areas in which black personnel could have a strong impact on how materials pertaining to black history and culture would be collected, interpreted and presented' (177). To say this was ironic may be an understatement. It exposes the nature of the system of segregation and the way it works through structures which enable zones of relatively autonomous activity on the condition that they are monitored. The institution had the power to determine its very existence and, as Stewart shows, unsurprisingly the work of African American writers of the NWU ended up being edited mostly by a white editors (Kennedy and Corse) and the manuscripts were left unpublished for several decades.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>A version of the manuscripts edited mainly by Kennedy was published by Gary W. McDonogh in 1993 under the title *The Florida Negro* (University Press of Mississippi). It consisted mostly of materials collected until 1937, that is before Hurston's employment. See Stewart analysis of Florida 'Negro unit' and the issues and tensions that emerged from that collection.

During its three years of operation, the Florida NWU had 16 employees. Despite the seemingly liberal premise for the founding of the NWU, the segregated system was rarely challenged. African American employees did not receive any organisational support or access to the advanced technological equipment available to their white peers, including recording machines. This reinforces the reality that the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ meant ‘segregated and unequal’ in practice. African American staff were not even given office space. The majority of them worked from their own homes, and after a while they sourced office space for themselves with the help of members of the local Black community at the Clara White Mission, which also functioned as a community centre, a shelter and a soup kitchen. It is important to note that these employees were not allowed into the FWP state office. In a document written in 1990 as part of a reference guide to the Florida Folklife collection, Stetson Kennedy – who was one of Hurston’s interviewers in the 1939 recording session – sheds light on how this separation policy functioned. Throughout his years working at the state office, he did not recall ‘there ever being editorial conferences in which blacks participated’ (Kennedy 13). The manuscripts, he explained, ‘came to us by mail or messenger, and every two weeks they sent someone for their paychecks’ (13). Not only did Black workers not have allocated office space, they delivered their texts as if they were merchandise, with almost no human contact or recognition of their authorial position. They took part in no meetings or discussions regarding the way their work was processed, edited and published.

Hurston was occasionally treated as an exception, but one that confirms the rule. For example, in 1938 another attempt was made to appoint Hurston to an editorial role. According to Boyd and Bordelon, the national director Henry Alsberg requested that Hurston be appointed as the editor of *The Florida Negro* with a higher salary of \$150 a month. This time it was Corse who refused the request but instead added \$75 to Hurston’s travel allowance. With regard to Hurston’s involvement in a Florida-wide recording expedition, Boyd reports that it was the

newly appointed national director of the FWP's folklore programme Benjamin A. Botkin who asked Hurston to participate, mentioning her experience in the field and with the technology: 'Botkin planned to send an audio recording machine – similar to the one Hurston had used in 1935, while working with Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle.' (Boyd *Wrapped in Rainbows* 322). Perhaps too conveniently, there is not much documentary evidence of her hiring, even in well-documented federal schemes such as the FWP and WPA where typically correspondence and internal memos were kept and archived. It is known that after her meeting with Alsberg in 1938, Hurston had dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to compiling an impressive document titled 'Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas' which was sent to Alsberg with a letter from Corse a month prior to the 1939 recording session (Hurston 'Proposed'). In this document, Hurston mapped the state's rich and diverse cultural heritage. She described in detail – with a level of perceptive awareness unmatched by her white peers at the time – the impact of geographical, social, ethnic and linguistic differences on local folklore. Hurston dubbed Florida as 'the inner melting pot of the great melting pot—America' and claimed that 'there is no State in the Union with as much to record in a musical folk lore, Social-Ethnic way as Florida has' (Hurston 'Proposed' 8). Having read this compelling piece of research, Corse could not deny the importance of Hurston's participation yet could not bring herself to fully recognise Hurston's deserved leadership. Corse wrote the following in a letter:

I believe that Zora can *assist* the expedition in getting excellent and original recording in the state. If possible, she should accompany the expedition on its trip through Florida, as she has an *intimate* knowledge of folk song and folklore sources in the State. [italics added] (Hurston 'Proposed' 2)

Corse was seemingly supportive and appreciative of Hurston's efforts. However, I argue that her letter is another manifestation of Corse's interest in separating Hurston from what she collects, thus sidelining Hurston's authority. Corse was benefiting from Hurston's 'intimate knowledge' but keeping her in the role of 'assisting' others. This letter is symptomatic of the

familiar process of identity violence, stipulating that once Hurston had provided a ‘glimpse of what black southern life was like when white people weren’t watching’ she could then be relegated to a ‘second-class’ position, required only to assist and accompany the expedition rather than to lead it.

Apparently, not everyone was comfortable with Corse’s change of plans, as evident in a letter sent by Harold Spivacke (the Chief of the Division of Music) to Corse in August 1939:

when this project was first approved we were under the impression that the recording was to be done by Miss Zora Neale Hurston. We have since heard that she is no longer connected with your project. This is a matter of concern to us because we naturally hesitate to place such valuable machinery in the hands of inexperienced parties to say nothing of the possible waste of expensive discs and needles. I trust you will be able to reassure me on this point. (Spivacke Letter to Corse’)

In his recollections, Kennedy reaffirmed and justified Corse’s decision to leave Hurston out of the group doing the official collecting and recording, explaining the impossibility of sending an ‘interracial’ team out to the field: ‘Those were the days when so innocent a gesture as a white man lighting a black woman’s cigarette could get them both lynched’ and ‘the solution handed from above, was to send Zora ahead as a sort of ‘talent scout’ to identify informants’ (Kennedy 17). The idea of having Hurston in charge of the expedition, assisted by a dozen Black fieldworkers and writers already employed in the NWU, was never even considered. This decision was necessary to uphold racist discrimination and was therefore non-negotiable, even when the availability of outstanding collectors like Hurston made it apparent that such decisions were counterproductive to the *raison d’être* of the institution – collecting.

However, when Hurston was hired to the FWP, Corse decided she should visit the state office. She informed the staff about Hurston’s visit and urged them to restrain themselves from any hostility or objection to her presence . Kennedy noted how rare such an event was, ‘unaccustomed as we were to receiving blacks of any description’ (13). Corse even said that

Hurston should be allowed to smoke in front of white people, and therefore asked the staff ‘to make allowances’ (13). Kennedy provides a pithy summary of Hurston’s visit: ‘And so Zora came, and Zora smoked, and we made allowances.’ (13). At first I regarded Hurston’s visit to the state office as being something out of the ordinary, an anomaly and deviation from the regulated system of segregation that Jacksonville violently maintained, like in the rest of Florida and neighbouring states in the South.<sup>57</sup> Kennedy’s recollection is often quoted in existing scholarship about Hurston and the FWP. It is frequently described as a ‘liberal gesture’ and its exceptional status is cast in a positive light. However, Kennedy’s nostalgic tone, seasoned with humour about ‘old times’, shifted my perspective on this matter. Kennedy’s recollection reveals another aspect of the control and oppression of Black people, the other side of the constraints and limitations imposed on their movement and behaviour. His words are indicative of the permissions and incentives prevailing during the Jim Crow era because they demonstrate how white actors exercised control, by framing the situation where Hurston was admitted as the only Black person in a completely white space as ‘making allowances’.

Patricia Hill Collins asserts that surveillance was a second strategy that accompanied segregation. She explains that while racial segregation was targeted at ‘African Americans as a group, surveillance is aimed at African American individuals’ (Collins *Fighting Words* 20). Segregation, she notes, ‘erases individuality’ by treating Blacks as ‘interchangeable members of a derogated group’, but surveillance ‘highlights individuality by making the individual hypervisible and on display’ (20). Collins argues that ‘techniques of surveillance’ manifest themselves in situations of ‘proximity characterized by a power imbalance’ (Collins *Fighting Words* 21). Hurston, as a Black woman, was positioned by Kennedy as hypervisible and on

---

<sup>57</sup> In her book *Zora Neale Hurston and a history of Southern Life*, Tiffany Ruby Patterson emphasises the racial reality and the toll it took on the Black community: ‘Florida, like in other states in the South an oppressive body of law established segregation and political disenfranchisement of black people as a constituent element of the New South. High levels of labor mobility brought social upheaval and economic insecurities. In this context, Florida became violent as any state in the South. Debt peonage, convict leasing, lynching, and whitecapping were commonplace.’ (55-6).

display for the white people who were in proximity. They shared their mission to collect materials for the FWP, but the power imbalance was clear. To paraphrase Collins further, these white collectors needed the illusion that the Black collector whom they invited into their private space was ‘one of the family’, even though she ‘actually had a second-class citizenship in the family’ (21)<sup>58</sup>. Hurston was fully aware of how this worked and articulated the idea of being made hypervisible and on display as early as 1928 in her essay ‘How It Feels to be Colored Me’. She stated: ‘I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp background.’ (Hurston, ‘How it feels’ 154). Hurston wrote this about her experience as Barnard College’s first Black student, however it is a description which easily fits the scenario of the segregated white office of the FWP a decade later.

### **The Interview**

At the time of the recording, Stetson Kennedy directed Florida’s Folklife Section, and Herbert Halpert (who was in charge of the Southern Recording Expedition which included this session) led the interview.<sup>59</sup> These facts would not be important if the gender and racial inequalities were not so evidently structured. Before meeting Hurston, Halpert had a few years of experience collecting folk songs from the New Jersey Pine Barrens, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and New York State.<sup>60</sup> According to Halpert, the committee decided that ‘it would be worthwhile to send a folksong collector to record the singers whose song text had already been

---

<sup>58</sup> Collins writes specifically about Black women working as domestics in white homes and the relation they have with white women. It is interesting to consider this work with regards to Hurston’s work as a maid and a domestic worker at the beginning and the near the end of her life.

<sup>59</sup> According to Halpert, his primary assignment was to record the songs of traditional singers that had already been interviewed by FWP’s workers, and some of them had been located and interviewed by Hurston as well. His title, the support he received from the various bodies (including the WPA, the FWP and the LOC) and the fact that he was equipped with the recording machine, positioned his role in the process as more central than the people responsible for the fieldwork itself. He mentioned John and Alan Lomax’s book *American Ballads and Folk songs* (1934) as a source of inspiration (Halpert 447).

<sup>60</sup> These trips were funded by the WPA and Columbia University, where he studied part-time for an M.A. degree. As a supervisor of the Bureau’s Folk-Song and Folklore Department, Halpert became the Federal Theatre’s representative on a Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the WPA, which met at Washington D.C. The committee’s role was to ‘coordinate the folklore studies of its various art projects’ (Halpert 447).

written down, primarily by workers on the Federal Writers' Project, in several southern states' (Halpert 447). Harold Spivacke, the chief of the Music Division of the LoC, provided the phonograph disks and guidelines on how to classify, index and preserve the records in the Music Division's Archive of American Folk Song. Halpert was assigned with undertaking the fieldwork. Halpert explained that it was 'the combination of my previous recording experience, my work with Herzog [George], and the convenient fact that my department had a recording machine made me eligible for the project' (448).<sup>61</sup> 'Undertaking the fieldwork' meant, as in other cases, that Halpert would record songsters who had already been sourced and interviewed by other, local FWP employees. He stated: 'Several of these workers were excellent collectors, and with their help, it was easy for me to record their informants.' (Halpert 448). Hurston, he recalled:

not only sang and talked for my recording, but was also my guide to a few singers. She was less helpful on a trip to the Spanish section of Tampa, but I managed on my own. I made 12 records in Florida in four days.' (451)

Halpert's short account of his encounter with Hurston reveals how natural it was for him to view himself as senior in position (he mentions 'my recording', 'my guide') and how unimportant Hurston's role was in his eyes.

Writing about the recording session, Bordelon describes Halpert's manner as 'noticeably condescending' (Hurston *Go Gator* 46). Hurston, on the other hand, stood out due to her 'ever-ready replies' (46). A good example of the exchanges between them can be found at the beginning of the session when Halpert asked Hurston, after she had briefly introduced the song she was about to sing: 'How did you happen to be going around getting songs?' (Hurston 'Gonna See'). Hurston did not need a second to think before her response which was armed with credentials including reference to disciplinary knowledge and her connection to an

---

<sup>61</sup> George Herzog was an ethnomusicologist who also completed his graduate studies in Columbia's anthropology department under the leadership of Franz Boas. Herbert collaborated with him on several occasions and together they compiled guidelines for field workers.

esteemed institution of learning: ‘I was *collecting* folk materials for Columbia University, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University.’ (46) [italics added]. By rejecting the inference that her collecting practice was arbitrary or fortuitous, and changing the verb from ‘getting’ to ‘collecting’, Hurston reclaimed her status and position as a collector. In addition, by twice stating the name of the prestigious Ivy League university, Hurston made sure to register that she did not ‘happen to be going around getting songs’ as if her work was simply the passive outcome of an incidental turn of events.

During the recording session, although Hurston performed and discussed 18 different songs, the session is still commonly framed as an interview. Rebecca Roach’s arguments about the effects of the interview form on society are relevant to our understanding of the place of this format within the New Deal’s initiatives. In *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* (2018), Roach claims that interviews, as a genre, ‘helped to construct the concept of the mass public and the nation, at a time of enormous political, socio-economic, and cultural upheaval’ (xx). She elaborates this further whilst tracing the various etymological origins of the word interview, calling attention to Ronald Christ’s emphasis on the Latin word *videre*, meaning ‘to view’. Prior to the mid-nineteenth-century, Roach claims, the term described a formal face-to-face meeting or literally an ‘inter-viewing’ for the purpose of the conference, but she also suggests, following Christ, that ‘it could also describe a “looking into” – an examination or inspection’ (xx). Roach’s work is focused primarily on literary interviews which took place during the twentieth-century, and her argument is pertinent to the structure of power in the Halpert-Hurston interview, from which two authors emerge: ‘the privileged and highly constructed interviewee-subject and a mediating, low status author in the figure of the interviewer’ (4). This disparity in status between the two, Roach claims, ‘reflects the privileging of certain kinds of authorship and labor’ (4). In the recording session under scrutiny, such disparity (and privileging) manifests in terms of Halpert’s and Hurston’s employment, and then again in the archives (4).



Halpert's questions during the session demonstrate a degree of indifference because they show a lack of reflection on the potential impact that such a rare exchange could have on a young and less experienced collector when facing such an accomplished collector and scholar. Besides the one remote question directed towards the origin of Hurston's collecting interest, which I have already discussed, and another question towards the end regarding the way she learns the songs, Halpert made little effort to obtain significant information that would endorse Hurston's position as a collector. Her status and authority as a collector had to be reconstructed from 'between the lines' and established by future generations of listeners assessing other parts of her work, while resisting the way Halpert and others have sought to inscribe her in the archive.

Simon J. Bronner articulates the potential of exchange in a paper he presented in a forum in 2010 called 'Collecting Memories: The AFS [American Folklore Society] Oral History Project': 'for as much as folklorists extol the value of hearing voices of tradition-bearers, one would expect an extensive record of folklorists offering narratives of their experience' (Bronner 1).<sup>62</sup> He explains that the oral histories conducted with American folklorists emerged during the 1960s and 'came relatively late in the history of American folkloristics' (1). Building on Bronner's focus on the potential of such an exchange, I seek to place the Hurston-Halpert recording within this context. Richard M. Dorson, a folklorist and advocate of folklore historiography, claims that the stories of the folklorists would differ greatly from historical writing and published scholarship. They would be rich with stories and anecdotes that would provide evidence of 'cooperative and collaborative' aspects which he believed to be inseparable from the collectors' works. (Dorson 30). It is important to note that even if we consider the growing efforts to interview collectors since the late 1950s, women remained critically underrepresented. Nonetheless, there are a few examples of interviews with women which we

---

<sup>62</sup> 'Collecting Memories' is a joint project of the American Folklore Society (AFS) and Utah State University (USU) launched in 2010 and featuring 'the voices of American folklorists'. Its aim, according to the website, is 'to document the development and change in the field of folklore since the mid-twentieth century'. The collection includes a list and description of interviews held in various institutions; the earliest dates back to 1950.

can draw upon to contemplate the contexts of such exchanges. Margaret Mead, an anthropologist and Hurston's classmate in Columbia, was interviewed in 1959 by Howard Langer. He introduced the interview with the following statement: 'across the table is Dr. Mead, the world's best-known anthropologist' (Langer). His reference to their sitting arrangement served to establish a level of respect and equality which was further underscored by the way he introduced her credentials and acknowledged her professional expertise. He then provided biographical details about her parents, childhood and university education. His first question was unequivocally different from Halpert's questions to Hurston about the origins of collecting practice: Langer asked, 'Dr. Mead, how did you become interested in anthropology as a career?'. He presupposed a genuine interest and an active process of decision-making that represents Mead as a recognised professional. Fortunately, Hurston often reflected in her writings on her work and her development as a collector, so we can draw from them some possible answers to questions she was not asked directly. One example can be found in her introduction to *Mules and Men*:

From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. It was fitting me like a tight Chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off to college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that. (Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 1)

In this extract from the introduction to *Mules and Men*, Hurston informed readers that not only was she familiar with African American folktales from birth, but she had also acquired the relevant education and training to look at them anew (referring to her studies with Boas). Halpert's questions, however, were concerned with various technical matters of Hurston's performance. The fact that these technical aspects – which were not without importance – were given a central and repeated focus in the interview only served to reaffirm the prescribed, contrasting roles of performer (Hurston) and collector (Halpert), reinstating the power dynamic at play. It is worth mentioning that he rarely follows up on the information that Hurston gives,

from the identity of the singers she met to the sites where her collecting took place. By failing to do so he reinforced the separation of the song's context from the moment of collection and the practice of collection. For example, after Hurston introduced the first song 'Goin' to See My Long-haired Babe' as a railroad spiking song that she collected in 1930 in Miami, a song which was sung to her by Max Ford, she began a vivid performance in which she sang the lyrics and imitated the sound of the hammer – which determines the rhythm of the song – by hitting on the table:

**Halpert:** You seem to be hitting down twice for the hammer. What is that?

**Hurston:** The two men face each other with the hammers and they call themselves breasters. They stand breast to breast. And one hammer comes down and the other one comes down.

**Halpert:** Immediately afterwards?

**Hurston:** Yes. One comes down. (Hammer. Pause. Hammer) [Hurston demonstrates again].

**Halpert:** I see. And how long is that between the double strokes?

In contrast, although some of Langer's questions to Mead could also be regarded as technical, they were primarily concerned with the technicality of Mead's own work, therefore the questions positioned her practice at the centre of the inquiry to produce knowledge and understanding of Mead's work as collector and anthropologist, drawing from her own experience. Questions like 'How did you first decide to study primitive societies? Where do you get the money from? What sort of equipment do you take? When do you arrive at the place that you study, where do you live, and how do you live?' provided Mead with opportunities to create a narrative about herself and reveal fascinating insights (Langer).<sup>63</sup>

In the case of the Jacksonville recording, and most of Hurston's collected work which ranges from songs to life histories and slave narratives, there was an attempt to address the varied working and living conditions experienced by the African Americans she had encountered. This is where and how Hurston's acts of care can be traced. Tiffany Ruby

---

<sup>63</sup> By framing his question this way, Langer again presupposed that Mead 'decided', implying intention, agency and decision-making.

Patterson re-evaluates Hurston's varied body of work about the South in order to highlight the great value this work offers for historical research. She claims that Hurston's novels, like her anthropological and folklorist work, stand among the 'richest documentary sources on black life, labor and culture in the early twentieth-century South. She faithfully chronicled black life – most notably the lives of working- and lower-class black women and men.' (Patterson 18). In her article 'Recovering Zora Neale Hurston's Work', Dorothy Abbott reveals how it was only after reading Hurston's folklore collection *Mules and Men* and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that Abbott was able to recognise what Gloria Jahoda called 'the other Florida' (Abbott 175). Abbott's essay was accompanied by an article written by Hurston in 1957 but never before published. In this article, titled 'Florida's Migrant Farm Labor', Hurston addressed the gap between the (most likely white) upper-middle class white Florida inhabitants who live in 'fabulous mansions' and enjoy 'pearl-made beaches' with 'giggling waves' and the 'subterranean forces, which flow beneath' where a 'nameless, faceless force makes possible Florida's new approach to its burgeoning agriculture' (Hurston 'Florida's Migrant' 199). She recorded their working conditions that included low temperatures, hunger and inadequate housing. The conditions depicted in this article are the backdrop of the songs she performed in this recording session. According to Hurston, this is 'how life was like for Florida's African American laborers during the early decades of the twentieth century' (199).

'Ah Mobile' (which also appears as 'Let's Shake It') is another lining song Hurston collected in Talahand, a railroad camp in northern Florida. She noted: 'this is not exactly a song. It's a chant for the men lining.' (Hurston 'Let's Shake It'). A rail typically weighs nine hundred pounds, Hurston stressed, and the 'men have to take these lining bars and get it in shape to spike it down'. They depend on the rhythm of the song to help them carry the rail correctly and safely. 'Shove It Over' like 'Ah Mobile' is a lining rhythm song that was sung to Hurston by Charlie Jones in 1933 on the railroad construction camp near Lakeland, Florida. Halpert's subsequent

questions to Hurston were not concerned with the reality of those camps, including the hard labour or living conditions. Nor was he interested in Hurston's encounters with these workers and singers and how she managed to archive in her body these songs they shared with her.

Hurston waited for no one and introduced the songs herself, rendering the interaction not quite like a regular interview. Very little significant conversation between Hurston and Halpert materialised. Halpert's unclear position and contribution to this exchange, I contend, caused him to find ways to assert his role and authority. He interrupted her speech several times, once to draw from his own experience: 'Because over in Mississippi, they show you by hitting. The way they did it was by several men taking a short stick.' (Hurston 'Let's Shake It'). When Hurston presented the gambling song 'Let the Deal Go Down', Halpert interrupted her explanation and comments with: 'I think a better way to explain it is how the cards are given out and how the people are.' (Hurston 'Let the Deal'). Paradoxically, Halpert's repeated questions about the specks of the labour involved, the workers' movements and their handling of the lining bars, created a meticulously detailed setting for Hurston's own performance and labour. During Hurston's performance of 'Ah, Mobile', the way she used her entire body to imitate the liner's movements and hammering sounds is clearly audible. Just before she ended the song, we can hear the effort in her breathing reaching a peak. After a few seconds of silence, Halpert asked her to repeat the performance and attempted to direct her: 'maybe you'd try to emphasize the approximate rhythm of how they would hammer the spikes by hitting against the table', he suggested, expecting her to perform according to his will (Hurston 'Let the Deal'). When she finished once again, Halpert said: 'well now, the only thing is that you were giving a long piece of singing without the rhythm of the ... hammer section. I want to know approximately how often that comes'. Halpert's attempt to recreate accurately the precise relation between the labour and the singing, through these technical details, overlooked who and what was right in front of him – Hurston, a collector. It was as though he was interviewing

Max Ford or any of the other men and women who performed these songs for Hurston. For Halpert, it seems that without the addition of numbers and statistics, Hurston's offering appeared incomplete.

### **The Guidelines**

During their conversation Hurston often provided information and insights that Halpert missed the opportunity to follow up. Ironically, Halpert belonged to a tradition grounded in the use of questionnaires and guidelines to assist fieldworkers in their interviews. He even contributed to the development of this practice. Halpert and George Herzog were working on a questionnaire which sought to:

guide American folksongs collectors in securing full contextual data from their informants. It included suggestions on how to ask the singer his or her opinion on such matters as what makes a good song, or a good singer, or what songs are liked best, and why. (Halpert 445)

Their questionnaire was never published but it influenced Halpert's own work. Part of the questionnaire was taken on board by B. A. Botkin and included in the instructions sent to fieldworkers working for the FWP. There has been much debate about these questionnaires and the poor results they often achieved in terms of essential information about the interviewees and their stories, especially for the WPA *Slave Narratives* collection. Even with this critique in mind, when we read questionnaires such as the WPA Folksong Questionnaire from March 1939 (Joint Committee on Folk Arts), it is easy to identify questions and probes that could have assisted Halpert as an interviewer to encourage Hurston to share more information, and therefore drastically changed his contribution to this session. Even though the majority of the questions were not intended for an interview with a collector, if Halpert was familiar with them he could have used them. First and foremost, the questions would have been fruitful for establishing exactly where the recording took place, a fact which remains uncertain but is of course crucial. In the fieldwork guidelines, Part II, number 6 states: 'Description (and, if

possible, photographs) of room, house, surrounding, etc.’. Some accounts report that the recording took place at the Clara White Mission and others suggest it was the state office in Jacksonville, which would be the main office. We know for certain that a recording session took place at the Clara White Mission as part of the Southern Recording Expedition in which various individuals and groups, all encountered and invited by Hurston and other local FWP employees, had recorded sharing oral testimonies, tales and songs. It is pertinent to my argument to ask (even if definitive answers are not available): in which of these spaces did Hurston carry out her performance and Halpert supposedly lead the interview? If Halpert had followed the guidelines, would he have mentioned that Hurston was visiting a segregated state office which would otherwise be inaccessible for African American workers? Building on the first question, and with Mead’s interview in mind, it seems reasonable to ask several questions: Did they sit around a table? Were they in a circle? Or, was Hurston standing, facing the two seated young men? Were there any other workers present during the recording sessions? Did Hurston smoke? Did she feel comfortable?

If Halpert had followed some of his own guidelines and used questions from Part IV about ‘Aesthetic and Psychological Factors’ such as ‘when did [the interviewee] first really like songs?’ or ‘when did [the interviewee] first like to sing?’, he could have produced an invaluable recording detailing Hurston’s personal relationship to the songs she recorded. After Hurston explained that she had learned the songs by joining the crowd, Halpert could have traced the origins of her method to find out when and how she began doing this and to discover how the ‘crowd’ reacted to her participation in the various places where she collected, especially considering that she was not known to them beforehand. Question 6 seems relevant to the work songs and chants she performed for the recording: ‘Does [the interviewee] sing differently (e.g., more or less loudly) under different conditions or circumstances?’. This question could have bridged technical matters of Halpert’s singing style with the wider context of the song and the

workers' experience. Further relevant examples from the guidelines are question 7: 'Comment (preferably in narrative form) on other circumstances of the interview, especially details which contribute to our understanding of the method of handling informants, the technique of questioning, the informant's attitudes and reactions, etc.'. This would have been valuable for assessing the situation of the recording and for knowing how the person leading the interview (in this case, Halpert) addressed this wider context. Hurston's well-established position as both insider and outsider, collector and performer, informant and rebel, I argue, served to challenge the existing structures of power upon which the FWP practices of collecting were premised. It is not an overstatement to claim that the twofold nature of Hurston's position within the FWP caused a kind of crisis in the institutional logic of folkloric collecting for the FWP.

This unusual situation wherein one collector was interviewing another risked the erosion of the context of collecting. It also risked losing the voices and agency of the various 'tradition bearers' and singers Hurston had met and was in direct contact with. One example was Max Ford, who worked on the railroad near Miami, and George Thomas from her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. Both men gave Hurston details about their lives and feelings while she was collecting. Yet again, several questions from the questionnaire stand out as more pertinent than those asked by Halpert. For example, in Part IV 'Aesthetic and Psychological Factors', question 10 ('What effect do his songs have on the rest of his life and on the lives of the people who listen to them?') and question 11 ('Do women specialize in a certain type of song? When do they sing?') would have generated invaluable insights.

Despite all the limitations of this interview, the fact that Hurston was rarely interviewed (let alone recorded) transforms this conversation into one of the most valuable opportunities to hear Hurston talking about her practice. Although the interviewer was not interested in making room for Hurston's experience and expertise, we can nevertheless see just how valuable Hurston's unusual and unstable position was as an insider and outsider. Hurston was a collector



and a performer, an informant and a rebel. Through her liminal role she performed an overt challenge to the existing structures of power relations on which the FWP's practices of collecting were premised. Assertively and powerfully, Hurston wove Black resistance into her writing and practice of collecting. In sum, Hurston's complex position, alongside her work which was constantly transcending the limits imposed on it, caused a necessary and productive crisis in the institutional logic of folkloric collecting.

### Chapter III: ‘When we get tired of one we jes let it go’<sup>64</sup>: Rethinking Preservation in Willis

#### Laurence James’s Practice and Collection

*‘You got to make your own worlds. You got to write yourself in. Whether you were part of the greater society or not, you got to write yourself in.’ – Octavia Butler, 2000*

#### On writing yourself *in* and refusal; introduction

In 1939 Willis Laurence James, an established composer, educator and collector of folk songs with fifteen years of fieldwork experience, submitted a grant application to the General Board of Education. This grant enabled him to take time off his teaching and other responsibilities at Spelman College in Atlanta and to finance extensive fieldwork to collect songs and music in the several Southern States. This work formed the basis for his first and only manuscript, *Stars in de Elements*, titled after a spiritual he had heard. This major study was completed in 1945 but remained unpublished for many years, despite James’s efforts, and later those of his widow, to publish it. Only in 1995, half a century after he wrote it, was it finally published. The intention behind James’s grant application, I argue, transcended the desire for financial gain and recognition from a national body. He used his platform to make a bold statement about the field of collecting African American folk music in the late 1930s. I read James’s letter as a deliberate effort to counteract both the hegemonic power held by white collectors and the effects of white supremacy. His letter can be read as a demand to take control over what Vincent Harding later called ‘the definition of the black experience’, which had been forcibly dominated by white narrators for too long, whether they were explorers, anthropologists, reformers or folklorists (Institute of the Black World 1). In his grant application, James wrote:

It is not enough merely to collect these songs. It is necessary to possess first-hand knowledge of Negro costumes, modes of expression, intimate domestic life and attitudes. [It requires] great patience and understanding to win their confidence and to have them sing with the naturalness and abandon with which they sing among themselves. I believe that I am qualified to undertake the work because I am a Negro, a singer, and a composer. (xiii)

---

<sup>64</sup> Opening quotation is from James Craig, composer and trainer, interviewed by William Laurence James and quoted in *Stars in de Elements* (43–44).

In this letter, James rejected the status quo in the world of African American folk music collection and exposed the limits of its domination by white collectors. White collectors had easier access to the field of collecting in terms of institutional and financial support, yet they often operated on and reproduced misconceptions and stereotypes (intentionally and unintentionally). James highlighted his Black identity and shaped his own practices as a negation of this status quo and its dominant actors, thereby refusing a position imposed on him by the discriminatory and violent system of segregation in place in the United States. He generated his own position and asserted it as a strength. By emphasising the centrality of positionality to the act of collecting, James resisted and undermined white people's control of the discipline. In his letter, James was demonstrating what Tina Campt calls a 'practice of refusal' (Campt 'Black Visual Frequency')<sup>65</sup>. The act of refusal as Campt defines it and James practised it, is empowering and productive. It insists on frames of reference that are different from those established by white hegemony, and these new frames of reference take a different view of what constitutes knowledge. By accentuating his positionality in this grant application, James reclaimed a position of power and authority in an otherwise unequal playing field. James's practices of refusal and reclamation will be evidenced and discussed throughout this chapter.

Moreover, embedded in such practices was the process of writing oneself *in*, as Octavia Butler implies ('Interview'). Such a tradition of writing-*in* has its roots in earlier narratives written by Olaudah Equiano, Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. I argue that James belongs to this tradition which was continued by many Black scholars and activists, including Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune and W.E.B. Du Bois. The extract from James's letter to the board

---

<sup>65</sup> '[...] a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of the possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.' (Campt 'Black Visual Frequency').

shows that he was not only writing himself *in*; he was committed to writing-*in* the lived experiences (and songs) of individuals and communities through his study of Black folk music. Those lived experiences included ‘costumes, modes of expression, intimate domestic life and attitude’ (xiii). Beyond its aim to produce a study of African American folk music, *Stars in de Elements* can also be read as a memoir – and is written in that style – the story of James’s own path into music along with travel narratives and documentation of some of his collecting journeys and encounters with various individuals and communities across the American South.

During his life James published several musical arrangements and compositions (many remain in manuscript form). He arranged six folk songs he collected for a recording for Paramount Records in Chicago, in which he also sang, accompanied by African American pianist Tiny Parham; however, only two of these recorded songs were released, in 1927.<sup>66</sup> In 1955 James published ‘The Romance of the Negro Folk Cry in America’ a work which was derived from his unpublished manuscript and focused solely on his thesis on the ‘cry’, which was considered by many of his contemporaries to be his greatest contribution to the study of African American folk music (James, ‘The Romance’, 15-30; *Stars* 16-35). To date, not much has been published about James other than two essays, the introduction to the publication of James’s manuscript in 1995, and a doctoral dissertation which was the first in-depth examination of his life and work (Cureau).<sup>67</sup> Introductory notes and short biographical entries appear in various publications (Abromeit 90, Maher 3-4, Southern 453). Minor uses of his work have been referenced, but they do not discuss James or his achievements and contributions in any depth (White 23-5; Floyd, ‘The Negro Renaissance’, 30-1).

---

<sup>66</sup> Blues scholar Bruce Bastin refers to this recording in one rather condescending line in his book. He writes: ‘Willis Laurence James of Atlanta’s Spelman College, who had recorded two “folk” songs in the accepted white style.’ (Bastin 76).

<sup>67</sup> All four of these were written by the same person, Rebecca Cureau.

Cureau's extensive yet unpublished 1987 dissertation is a rare study which I find fascinating.<sup>68</sup> The dissertation provides essential source material and insights into James's biography and work. Cureau's objectives to determine James's place in Afro-American music and history and to remedy the neglect of his work are therefore aligned with my own objectives today. Three decades have passed since Cureau wrote her rich examination of his James's life and work. This long interval only highlights the urgency of further appraisal and reintegration of James's contribution in the context of the present era with its growing demands to upend white dominant narratives and decolonise curricula, educational disciplines and departments. James's model of collecting resonates well with this agenda. In this chapter, I resituate James's concrete and potential contributions to the historiography of folk collecting and the history of Black music.

My research shares Cureau's commitment to reintegrating James and his important contribution to the discipline. Moreover, James's work, words and methods highlight how essential it is to situate his practice within its broader social context and to study his life and work by also questioning the institutions, concepts and methods which defined the time of his collecting practice. This chapter emphasises that music collecting is a crucial part of the Black radical tradition and its methodologies. Placing James's letter within the Black radical tradition enables a new reading of his work as part of the nation-wide, cross-generational, collective African American effort to 'define for itself and for others the nature of its own past and present', to quote Vincent Harding (Institute of the Black World 1). Simultaneously, there is the inevitable need to confront racial colonialism in the United States, 'for America confronts black people with questions which we, at the pain of our life and honor, must answer [...] "speaking the truth" about racial colonialism in America presses itself to the center of any research for the vocation of the black scholar' (1). As Harding writes (echoing

---

<sup>68</sup> The interviews Cureau conducted with James's widow Mrs. Theodora Fisher James, his students, and other people who could share their experiences, are invaluable. The majority of these interviewees are no longer alive.

Du Bois), James as a Black scholar understood and opposed the impact of structural racism, the history of the appropriation of Black culture by white individuals and institutions, and the expressions of entitlement. This understanding is clearly implied in his grant statement. I claim that James's significant contribution lies in the way he expanded his community through his particular form of 'collecting' and understanding of the practice. By recognising the people from whom he collected songs (and in the company of whom he learned about their music) as his peers and interlocutors, they each became a member of a musical community. This chapter seeks to reconstruct and reincorporate James's community, its role, and his agency within it.

After James provided his analysis of the oppressive status quo to the board, he went on to challenge the status quo by presenting his qualifications, methods and objectives as a collector. James was a violinist, tenor singer, composer and arranger, choir director, music professor and educator, and a collector of folk music who was also an active member of his community. James grew up in, and later taught at, predominantly Black-run and led institutions. Among them were the Baptist Church and its educational organisations, and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) where he worked until his passing in 1966. He collected work songs, spirituals, sermons, selling cries and more, which he would then arrange and compose for men's and women's choirs and mixed choruses. In his writings, lectures and letters he expressed radical and progressive ideas about the history of African American music. He argued that there was a degree of continuity, development and readjustment of African musical expressions across time, most notably in patterns of rhythm, while also asserting that there were local, regional and work-related influences on compositions. James celebrated cultural heritage and lineage and was devoted to collaborative and collective work that resulted in institution-building and the advancement of new curricula and methods.

The primary aim of this chapter is to explore James's radical, nuanced writings and collecting practice which were articulated, demonstrated and advanced through the various roles and positions he held, and remain steeped in his long-standing commitment to the empowerment of Black people through music and song. Concurrently, I seek to position James within a network of collaboration and collective work which offered support and exchange and which was crucial to ongoing African American resistance and independence and relevant to notions of building and creating anew. As Clyde Woods argues in *Development Arrested*, for more than three centuries 'the African American working class had daily constructed their vision of a non-oppressive society through a variety of cultural practices, institution-building activities, and social movements' (39). James's collection and writings provide a window into an intellectual and social space like the one identified by Woods – a world in which James and his contemporaries addressed political, professional, artistic and pedagogical aspirations against the oppressive milieu of white supremacy, disenfranchisement and segregation. At the heart of James's practice lay a distinct focus on the interaction between self-fashioning and independence.

The second aim of this chapter is to challenge the concept of preservation, which remains a central paradigm within folk collecting, and to foreground James's alternative approach to collecting. Furthermore, given the centrality of preservation as a model, it is essential to reconsider James's minor place in the existing scholarship. As a result of James's insistence on working within and empowering the various African American networks, communities and institutions while actively resisting and criticising external practices of appropriation, he has remained a figure who is less familiar than his white counterparts within the written historiography of folk music collecting. Making a distinction between written forms of memorialisation and canonisation on the one hand, and more ephemeral forms including performative, oral or audible manifestations on the other, is key to my claims. This chapter is

my attempt to overturn the marginalisation of James's body of work and to reject the margins by which James's work was originally classified. The first part of this chapter focuses on James's earlier years, including his involvement in the Black Church and different HBCU, and explores his studies, pedagogy and public engagement activities. The second part makes a close examination of James's collecting trips to Alabama's coal mining towns and to Savannah, Georgia, in the early 1940s. The third part of the chapter addresses the concept of preservation and its limitations and constraints.

### **Formations**

James was born at the turn of the century on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1900 in Montgomery, Alabama, into an era defined by inequality, discrimination, disenfranchisement and violence. In the following year, a call for separated schoolhouses for African Americans and white people made its way into the constitution of Alabama.<sup>69</sup> Yet, at the time of James's birth, there were more than thirty thousand African Americans working as trained teachers across the South and fighting to improve the rates of literacy among African Americans. Illiteracy had been forced upon the enslaved by legislation (and other means) and persisted in the post-slavery era (Anderson 2). James, a beneficiary of Black-led higher education, became part of this legacy at the age of twenty-three when he took his first teaching role at the HBCU Leland College in Baker, Louisiana, following the completion of his studies in the Music department of Morehouse College in Atlanta (fig. 3.1).

---

<sup>69</sup> Section 256 of the 1901 Constitution states: 'separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race' (Alabama).





Fig. 3.1. Morehouse College Quartet, ca. 1920. Seated, Fredrick D. Hall, first bass; Standing left to right: Willis James, second tenor; Clifton Perry, first tenor; Sanford Dunson, second bass. Photo from the private collection of Theodora Fisher James (Cureau 39).

At Morehouse, James was a student of the African American violinist and educator Kemper Harreld (1885-1971) who would later become his long-time colleague. James entered the Morehouse Academy in the tenth grade and studied with Harreld for seven years. Harreld's successful leadership, claims Cureau, was an influence on James.<sup>70</sup> Music scholar and musician Josephine Harreld Love said in an interview that her father Kemper Harreld loved folk music: 'My father's theory was that spirituals and all other types of folksongs were *the* sacred songs and that they should be kept simple' to avoid the 'over-elaborate arrangements' that he disliked (Love 184). Harreld also arranged some folk songs that were featured in his college programmes. Love explains that Harreld was devoted to the promotion of folksongs research through his own field investigation. She recalls that Harreld also 'encouraged his students to

---

<sup>70</sup> In 1911 Dr. John Hope, Morehouse's first African American president, hired Kemper to establish the music department. Cureau writes that Hope, as a founding member of the National Association of Negro Musicians and founder of the Atlanta Colored Music Festival Association in 1910 (the first festival to be run and performed only by African Americans), knew many musicians whom he invited to perform in Atlanta. He was also the founder of the Morehouse College Glee Club, developed the College orchestra, and introduced courses in music theory, history and appreciation (28-9).

share the harmonization they had brought to college from [their homes in] various sections of the South' (Green 184). Such invitations by Harreld must have registered deeply with James as a student, providing pupils from various backgrounds and localities with a strong sense of validation and pride through local song traditions. Later on, when James started composing and arranging folk songs, Harreld used this work for the singing groups he led. A programme from the 1934 Negro Intercollegiate Concert (fig. 3.2) is telling: the concert included the participation of six Black local colleges and was dedicated solely to African American folk music composed by African American composers.

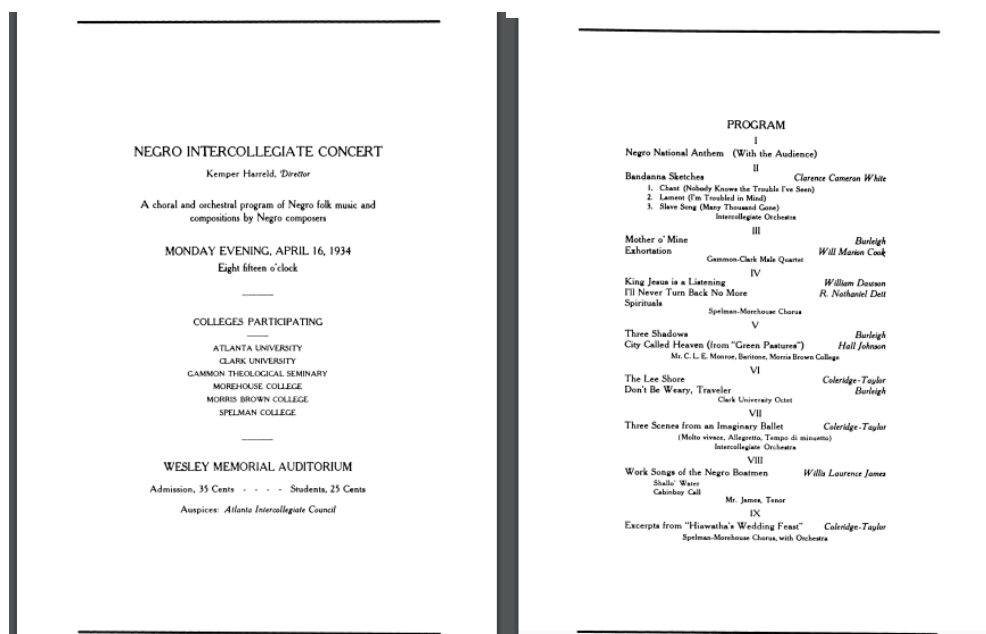


Fig. 3.2. Program of Negro Intercollegiate Concert, Wesley Memorial Auditorium, 1934 (Green 190-91).

The concert programme reveals Harreld's commitment to preserve, support, disseminate and educate through music performance and collaboration.<sup>71</sup> In 1923 Harreld also recorded his own violin solo with Black Swan Records – the first Black-owned recording company – and was the vice-president of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM). Harreld's associations, collaborations and initiatives shed light on the breadth and

<sup>71</sup> The collaborating institutions were Atlanta University, Clark University, Common Theological Seminary, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College and Spelman College.

strength of exchange among the various Black networks of musicianship during the first half of the twentieth-century.

Oral, and therefore unwritten, forms of music practice were intrinsic to Black composers such as Harreld and James, and many others. In his essay ‘Negotiating Blackness in Western Art Music’, the scholar-composer Olly Wilson argues that ‘the new musical paradigms established by these [Black] composers did not occur within a cultural vacuum’ (70), explaining that ‘while working within a written music tradition, they revelled in musical concepts that were intrinsic to Black oral music practice [...] They also thoroughly internalized musical concepts both within and without the veil that allowed them to make that leap of creativity that resulted in a new ordering of traditional concepts’ (70). Wilson’s account of Black composers’ attitudes and methods reaffirms the importance of James’s commitment, as a composer and educator, to Black musical traditions and the social and collective aspects of music creation and dissemination through non-commercial platforms. The dual position of the Black composer articulated by Wilson (echoing W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of the Double Consciousness), provides a useful frame for James’s overall approach to music, whether he was collecting, composing, arranging or performing.

The dedication to James’s mother on the title page of *Stars in de Elements* acknowledges her central role in the formation of his musical identity: ‘To my mother, Minnie Ellis James Washington, who sang to me, before my ears knew the sound’ (title page). In a 1965 lecture-demonstration, James stated that ‘all my people, at least all that I know, are of folk background, except my mother’ (Cureau 10). As Cureau suggests, James was referring here to his mother’s upbringing, but also emphasising that her situation was exceptional. In her dissertation, Cureau reconstructs Minnie Ellis’ biographical background. She was born in 1883 and had one sister (10). They were orphaned but remained part of the Ellis household, who were most likely her parents’ enslavers, and they had ‘family status’ which included access to education (10). Minnie

Ellis became a teacher and active member of the Baptist church in her community (10). This is the context of James's 1965 statement. While his mother represented and advanced ideals of racial uplift by gaining and providing education, the majority of the people he knew had little or no access to such opportunities. Furthermore, snippets from *Stars in de Elements* support the claim that he was influenced by the 'folk' that surrounded him before formally setting out to collect. To understand how James's conception of tradition took shape, it is important to pay attention to his early encounters with music and the way he retained these influences. The earliest recollection in his manuscript is of a song he learned at the age of six from a boy who used to take his cow to pasture while singing the song.<sup>72</sup> He learned other songs from the fishmonger in the local fish market and the coalman in his neighbourhood (*James Afro-American Music*). Since childhood, it seems, and certainly as a collector, James valued people's strength and resilience, lyrical and compositional creativity, and the sense of pride they projected in their music and songs. Over the years, categories such as influence, generational exchange, inheritance and lineage became central to James's understanding of the essence of folk music and tradition. This conception of tradition is encapsulated in the dedication to his mother and his acknowledgement of 'those who have sung the songs that have given me much of my knowledge' (preface).

James and his mother moved out of Alabama to Pensacola, Florida, before settling in Jacksonville in about 1910 (Cureau 11). In Jacksonville, James and his mother attended the Bethel Institutional Baptist Church, the oldest Baptist congregation in the city. James studied at the Florida Bethel Academy (founded by the church in 1892) from fourth to ninth grade and his mother taught home economics classes in the school (Cureau 12-3). The church provided James with much more than religion, which becomes clear as we consider his writing and

---

<sup>72</sup> The song 'All My Sins Done Taken Away' was, according to James, 'the first Negro folk song I can remember having learned as a child of about six in Pensacola, Florida. It was learned from another small Negro boy who brought the cows to pasture next to our home every morning. Since he always came singing this jubilee at the top of his voice, we learned it by absorption' (*Stars* 149).

career. James's music teacher was the African American tenor singer Sidney Woodward (1860-1924) who also sang in the academy's choral group as a member of a quartet.<sup>73</sup> The church was the place where he acquired his musical education and his song repertoire. The many concert programmes in James's collection demonstrate how the church became his preferred stage and the place where he performed regularly throughout his life (fig. 3.3)<sup>74</sup>. The church was a space in which a collective social and political experience was formed.

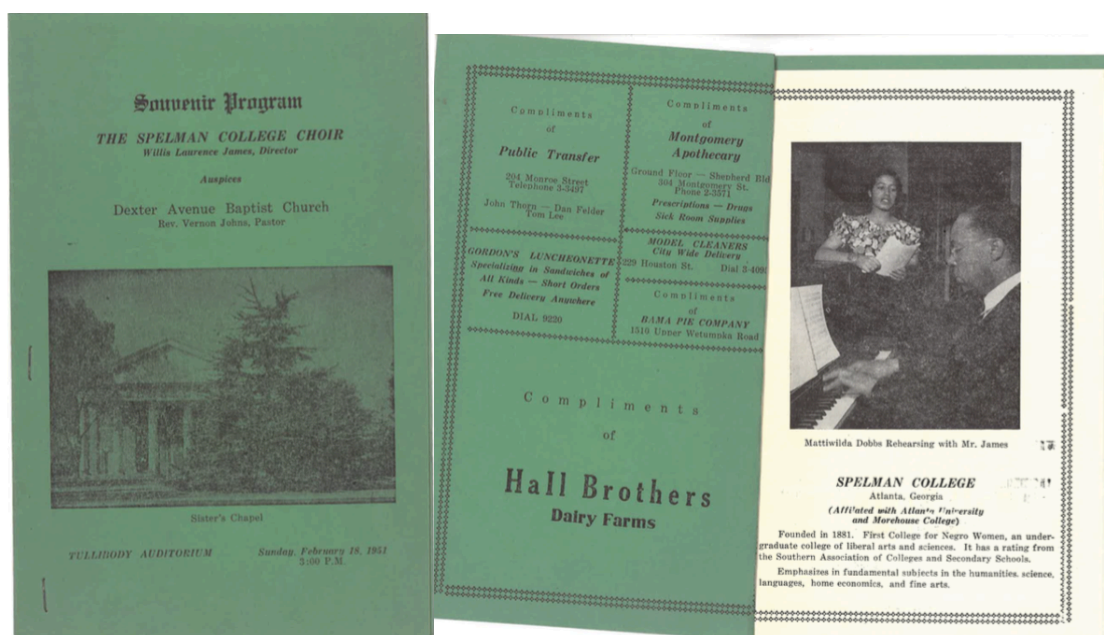


Fig. 3.3. Souvenir Program – The Spelman College Choir, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 1951. In the picture on the right, James plays the piano next to Mattwilida Dobbs. Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive.

The church was a source of inspiration and influence on James in an even deeper sense. From a young age, James was immersed in the church, a place which brought together spirituality and devotion in music which was to shape his later life as a choir director, composer, and collector of Black folk music. It also set an example of Black sufficiency, as a place where

<sup>73</sup> Cureau states that Woodward's influence over his young students 'extended far beyond the Florida Baptist Academy and vocal music' and he was committed to providing James with a 'proper instruction on the violin' which prompted him to take young James to Atlanta, Georgia, to play for Kemper Harreld (Cureau 15).

<sup>74</sup> There are many dozens of music programmes and invitations to various performances that took place locally in Atlanta, and regionally in various states in the South. This specific programme took place in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, which played a central role in the Civil Rights Movement under the direction of Vernon Jones (and then his successor Martin Luther King Jr.) and during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. See Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Atlanta, Georgia.

Black pride and self-fashioning could manifest. Of the 250 songs James included or referred to in his manuscript, more than half have religious or spiritual elements to them. This dominance reflects the plethora and richness of the songs gathered in the areas he visited, but also the important place they held in his heart and his song collection. James was equally interested in the social and political identity of the 'Black Church' and its materialisation in diverse institutions, as well as the different repertoires and performance styles that each church enabled and shaped. The Black Church is a strong historical and cultural force. Mary Pattillo-McCoy, for example, argues that the Black Church influences the 'script and staging of organization efforts in black communities by providing a *cultural* blueprint' for diverse activities (768). The Black Church fulfils many functions: it 'acts as a school, a bank, a benevolent society, a political organization, a party hall, and a spiritual base' (769). Its power and influence derive from its history as one of the few institutions owned and run by African Americans (769). For Gayraud S. Wilmore, its emergence during the nineteenth-century represents the first Black freedom movement amid white supremacy and the enslavement of Black people in the United States. In a similar vein, Jon. F. Sensbach defines the role of the church for the enslaved and the free African American as a 'vessel of black identity' (401). Allison Calhoun-Brown sees the generalisation of the term 'black church' as a testament to the important role these churches had in the African American community, notwithstanding the wide variety of congregations and denominations (Baptist, Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, etc.), it's the geographical diversity (urban, rural, northern, southern), and the fact that they have been 'separated and distinct from both mainstream religious and organizations and white society' (169). Calhoun-Brown argues that these different Black churches were drawn together into the singular institution called 'the black church' to the extent that they were 'united by their cultural, historical, social, and spiritual missions of fighting the ravages of racism' (169). This idea of the church as a unified force, rather than a collection of discrete institutions, is reinforced

by James's collection. Despite his longstanding membership of the Baptist church where he performed, he ventured beyond his own church to collect songs from every denomination in both rural and urban environments.<sup>75</sup>

As Cureau argues, James's first teaching position at Leland College was crucial for his development as both an educator and a folklorist and helped determine how these two roles complemented each other. Like many of the Black colleges and schools that were founded in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, Leland College grew out of the church. The College was established in 1870 in the basement of Tulane Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans with the 'purpose of promoting Christian Education among the people of Louisiana and adjacent states' (History of Leland University 2). It sought to prepare ministers for preaching the gospel and to train teachers in a variety of trades so to 'qualify men and women to discharge efficiently all the responsibility of life' (2). The College was able to purchase a tract of land uptown and moved there few years after. The university grew fast; in 1904 more than one thousand students were enrolled. However, the 1915 hurricane and its ensuing flood destroyed local neighbourhoods and landmark buildings, among them Leland College and its dormitory building. White benefactors took advantage of the disaster to sell the land for profit, as the neighbourhood was going through gentrification following the opening of nearby Tulane University and the construction of residential dwellings in that area (Campanella).

Despite the objections of local African American Baptists, some of them Leland alumni, and their advocacy to keep Leland in New Orleans, in 1922 the trustees purchased 160 acres on the former Groom Plantation in Baker, Louisiana, and reopened the College the following year (Campanella). The move from the city significantly reduced the university's accessibility for various Black communities. Despite the 'spacious campus' and its 'attractive'

---

<sup>75</sup> After Bethel in Jacksonville, James was a longstanding member of the Friendship Baptist Church, Atlanta (established 1862). Friendship was also the basis for the three Black educational institutions of Atlanta: Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College. On the church's website, James's name is recorded under the subtitle of 'education' as one of the church's distinguished members, together with a short biography.

buildings, ‘the student body had shrunk from a thousand in its height in the city to about 300 students’ (Campanella). John B. Watson, a former Morehouse professor, became the College’s president and brought along with him several of Morehouse’s teachers and former students like James who together worked to rebuild the College ‘from the ground up’ (Cureau 47). James was appointed as head of the Music Department and was its only teacher. A letter sent by Watson to Morehouse president John Hope detailed the communities that were living in rural Louisiana at that time. This letter reveals the neglect of the African American communities in all aspects of life, from education to employment. Cureau writes that James, like the rest of the faculty, had to make do with ‘little equipment and limited facilities with which to work’ and that this experience ‘would test not merely his recent training, but his ingenuity and adaptive skills as well’ (49). The success James managed to achieve with so few resources is testament to his broad skills and understanding of his profession which extended beyond the important task of delivering a body of knowledge to a group of students. James initiated ‘[a] basic music curriculum that suited the special needs and goals of a small teacher-training institution, which included music education, fundamentals of theory, voice, piano and music appreciation’ (Cureau 49). To expand the curriculum and to raise funds to equip the department with necessities, James founded an orchestra and a choral ensemble and established a tradition of performances. This initiative gained popularity in the Leland community and the city of Baton Rouge.<sup>76</sup> It was through these concerts and the small fee collected from attendees that James could pay for the necessary materials and equipment for the department. The lack of funds available to purchase music sheets, Cureau explains, ‘made it necessary for him to both arrange and write out parts for his instrumental and choral ensembles’ (50). One of the programmes during his tenure included six arrangements he made for ‘Negro Melodies’ which he had collected in Louisiana (Cureau 50). These activities and

---

<sup>76</sup> Mrs. I.S. Powel was a resident of Baton Rouge and a student at Southern University during James's tenure. In an interview with Cureau, she said that she 'always attended Mr. James's Leland Choir Records' (Cureau 49).



strategies should be understood in the context of James's biography and the history of Black institution building, grounded in a refusal to accept the material conditions of scarcity imposed on the community. James's endeavours position him in a larger cohort of talented and devoted music teachers who resisted the funding constraints and created the infrastructure for Black-produced music to continue to be shared, taught and developed.<sup>77</sup>

At Leland, James met Theodora Joanna Fisher, a recent college graduate from Spelman who was appointed by Watson in 1926 as an instructor of Mathematics, German, English and Ethics (Cureau 57). The couple married and then moved to Montgomery, James's hometown. Both joined the faculty of the Alabama State Normal (called Alabama State University today), one of the oldest state supported institution in the United States that was devoted specifically to the preparation of Black Teachers ('The ASU Legacy'). James taught public school music, violin and orchestra as well as a voice course in music appreciation, and he also directed the band and the orchestra. The music department included several musical organisations such as the Teachers Freshman Choir, Concert Band, 'Bama State Collegians, 'Bama State Revellers, Cavaliers and others. James organised a male quartet. This relatively large number of musical organisations, argues Cureau, 'was indicative of the philosophy of leadership of State Normal' (60). Harper Trenholm, the president at that time, like James and Watson, was a Morehouse graduate.<sup>78</sup> As a student in Morehouse, he also sang in the Morehouse glee club. Trenholm's ascent in his profession exemplifies again that these HBCUs had nurtured generations of educators, administrators and leaders who then moved to other HBCUs to continue the legacy. In sum, music was integral to the fabric of these Black colleges in the South, despite limited budgets, financial insecurity and other difficulties and challenges they faced in the first half of

---

<sup>77</sup> According to Edgar Rogie Clark's study in 1940, there were one hundred music instructors in the twenty-nine colleges accredited by the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States, an average of 3.4 teachers per institution (Clark 582).

<sup>78</sup> Harper Councill Trenholm (1900-1963) was appointed president when he was only twenty-six years old and became the second African American president of the college; he succeeded his father Dr. George Washington Trenholm (1872-1926) after his sudden death (Cureau 59-60).

the twentieth-century (Clark 582). These individuals and colleges went to great efforts to overturn the neglect of musical education in high schools in the South and especially in rural areas where it the neglect was even greater.<sup>79</sup>

Edgar Rogie Clark provides an interesting statistic concerning gender equality in the numbers of music instructors in thirty-two Black schools and colleges he studied, which was unusual compared to other fields. In 1940, although only men were heading the music departments, the instructors included forty-eight women and fifty-two men (Clark 582). Clark's study also reveals that 'applied' music courses were mainly offered in piano (at twenty-seven colleges), voice (twenty-two), violin (seventeen) and organ, while training in other instruments was less common (582). In the 'theory' category, harmony courses (sixteen colleges) and sight singing (twelve) were more common but not offered in all colleges, and composition was taught only at five colleges (Clark 585). However, all twenty-nine colleges had chorus and sixteen also had a band or an orchestra: these played central roles in the music education but also in the colleges' social fabric and engagement with the public (585). These three programme components – applied courses, theory and composition – were integral to James's position as a music professor but also to his role as the director of the chorus and other music organisations on campus. Twenty of these colleges offered 'Appreciation of Music', seventeen offered 'Public School Education' and ten had 'Practical Teaching and Observation'; all of these courses equipped future teachers with the educational tools they needed (Clark 585). Only ten colleges offered 'History of Music'. Only one college offered the 'Negro in Music' (585) but the report does not reveal which college. James's notes, however, show that in the 'applied' courses he taught he always advanced the importance of 'appreciation' of various musical expressions, and right from his early teaching experiences in Leland he always included African American folk music and its history. Clark notes the

---

<sup>79</sup> The survey found that of the thirty-two schools studied only half offered music courses (Clark 587).

importance of the role of the music teacher and the weight of responsibility on them: ‘Greater demands are made on the music teacher than on any other teacher. He has no regular hours, and his services are always desired. His success depends upon his earnest desire to spread beauty; and, above all, he must possess a musicianship which shall be of the mind and hearty rather than of the fingers and the larynx’ (585).

The records about James’s students and their paths to performance, education and public leadership offer more proof of James’s talent and devotion to music and music education. In Eileen Southern’s comprehensive historical account *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, James is mentioned only once, briefly, in a section dedicated to ‘Music Educators’, but it is important to my claim regarding James’s far-reaching contribution. Southern justly highlights the connection between composers and education, stating that ‘Several of those who published compositions during the 1930s and ’40s were more active in the field of music education – as teachers of talented young composers and performers, as leading figures in the organization of musical groups and events, and as representatives and consultants to various national and international music bodies’ (452). Southern cites James as one of these composers who was more active as an educator. Judging by this passage, James’s considerable work in the field of song collection and in music was largely neglected. It seems that music education, even though it included performance and transmission of music, was not valued as highly as other fields of musicianship that take place upfront and on stage. Southern does acknowledge the role of education in the advancement and development of Black music, yet its marginal place in her work – illustrated by her brief account – reaffirms its overall lesser position and appeal among scholars of music.<sup>80</sup>

In *Stars in de Elements*, James included the song ‘Lis’n, Big Boy’ which was a favourite at the State Teachers’ College in Montgomery. While James did not mention when or where he

---

<sup>80</sup> The whole section is only two pages and the brief biographies are approximately fifty words long (Southern 452–54).

collected the song, his description of it emphasised the educational context of the life of the song: ‘Andrew Branch, Winston Jones, Joseph Paige, and Andrew Fair, who were students there and who later taught music in state schools, made it very popular by teaching it to the children in their schools’ (James *Stars* 257). The song is a railroad work song in call-and-response style. It is also one of the few songs James taught to the male glee clubs. The way that this song passed through generations of students makes up for the lack of recorded documentation; it would be fascinating to discover how James arranged this song for a male quartet. When James became the director of the College Marching Band in his second year, he wrote the ‘Bama Fight Song’ which is still played and sung today at the university’s football matches. All of these examples serve to reframe James as a central figure in the Black Southern music scene. His musical activities took place in the classroom and in the performance hall, and most notably through his role as a remarkable model and mentor who inspired a generation of students to follow in his footsteps into education and leadership as well as performance.

### **Resisting Erasure – Work Songs and Spirituals**

In his writings, James highlighted white collectors’ misconceptions and stereotyping as examples of a range of exploitive practices, while he also stressed the urgent need for Black-authored scholarship. For example, in *Stars in de Elements* he wrote: ‘the Negro remains a factor not generally understood by the white man’ (162). James diagnosed the pathology of white collectors and their deeply entrenched colonial gaze and fantasies as characteristic of their quest for a constructed, or rather imagined, authenticity associated with Africa. The quotation below illustrates his cogent assessment:

The white man has been busy trying to find the cause of Negro musical uniqueness somewhere in Africa, when the cause was always present by his side with the Negro, was suffering and struggling for existence and pouring out his tension, despair, love, and, yes, hate in his strange native cries, which in turn fascinated the white tormentor and made him his willing student, disciple, and musical conferrer. (*Stars* 34)

In this statement, James's emphasis on white collectors' infatuation with Black music and song reflects upon a long tradition of white consumption of Black entertainment, or "Blacks" as entertainment, which was (and still is) inseparable from racist practices of exploitation and subjugation. As an example, James referred to the prying eyes of the white collectors who entered the Black church. He drew attention to the churchgoers who were reluctant to satisfy the collectors' fixations and demands. By modifying their behaviour in the presence of white collectors, these people retained an autonomous space as well as the possibility of articulating their own experiences. James wrote:

It is not strange that the Negro, in spite of his good nature, is capable of resenting the invasion of his house of worship by outsiders who seek entertainment... He has well-known high esteem for his church and his religion, and he is generally not willing to assume the role of the performer for the satisfaction of some song collector, novelist, playwright, or curious listener. The mere presence of such persons, especially if they are of a different hue, will often modify the immediate course of the event. No, the white man cannot always judge the Negro by what he is able to get out of him, even in so free a field as his songs. (*Stars*, 166)

James's 1939 grant application was successful and he set out in September of that year on a four-month trip with a declared interest in work songs which he argued had been historically and intentionally overlooked by white collectors.<sup>81</sup> The outcome of this neglect within the dominant paradigm of preservation was erasure. As white collectors encouraged and hand-picked spirituals, 'the first work songs of the Negro slave and ex-slave were lost to the world' (*Stars* 66). James's words underscore the overarching argument of my dissertation regarding the interconnectedness of preservation and extinction. Comparisons of work songs sung by the enslaved and work songs of the twentieth-century, argued James, could have contributed to our understanding of the musical developments of Black music and could also 'produce a picture of the Negro's mind during slavery which is different from that shown

---

<sup>81</sup> Another three months in the summer of 1940 were devoted to the preparation and organisation of the materials for publication.

through the spiritual' (167). James called Black labourers 'troubadour[s] of toil' and highlighted the importance and uniqueness their songs:

All of the things that have developed in the routine of his occupation seem to be turned to pure gold in the mind of the black troubadour of toil. The most compelling humor, philosophy, determination, indignation, remorse, love, hope, despair, pride, recklessness, and loyalty find expression through the emotional gamut of the work song. (71)

The abundance of work songs provided by James in *Stars in de Elements* supports these varied expressions. However, the most repeated and visible expressions are two types of work song: the first type testifies to the hard work involved and the working conditions, and the second type reiterates the violence that was used against Black workers since slavery and well into the twentieth-century as part of the legacy of slavery. These songs speak to the impact of the systematic racism and segregation that maintained and advanced a societal hierarchy relying on fear, violence, oppression, but where the compulsion to rebel and resist also thrived. It was due to these conditions that James argued the following: 'one cannot be unaware of the very vital reason for the lamentations frequently welling from the realm of the work songs' (90). James saw more than music in these songs: they revealed 'a singular side of the Negro that has yet come to a fuller realization' (90). The testimonial aspects of these songs, as well as the resentment expressed in them, are most likely the reasons why the songs were neglected by the early white collectors. These collectors 'were transfixed and charmed by what they heard of spirituals', as Harold Courlander describes it in his preface to 1995 edition of the 1867 anthology *Slave Songs of the United States* (preface). James provided an example of the first type of song, depicting the toll of the hard working conditions on the lives of the Black workers as expressed in the line: 'Been here f'om can't ter can't'. According to James, it was a common message, although its lyrics could vary, expressing the reality that men often went to work early in the morning in darkness and returned home late, again in the dark, unable to see clearly (73). An example of the second type of work song addresses the power relations and structural racism

which can be read in the lines: ‘De cap’m got a rock quarry / in de way back o’his head’ (73). James explained that the workers see the captain as ‘unable to think of a kind word or do a good deed for the men who work under him. As they say, “he don’t never think nothing but hell!”’ (72). James asserted that the figure of ‘de cap’m’ is striking, ‘for the cap’m is the Negro’s nemesis’ (72). This verse is another example: ‘Mamma, you ain’t been told / How yo’ son was hired as a man / den treated lak a dog in de cold’ (102). These sentiments are intensified in another line taken from a different song: ‘Ef I had mah weight in line / I’d whip dis cap’m / Twell his clothes start fryin’ (72). James explained: ‘here, the mule driver, by wishing for an impossible weapon, has excused his failure to commit the suicidal act that burns in his soul – flogging the white man’ (72).

James’s first experience of fieldwork was during his tenure at Leland College (1923-1928) and involved collecting songs from the Black workers on the sugar plantations in Louisiana and around the levees of the Mississippi River. The river is of interest in connection to James’s practice of collecting. James wrote: ‘life connected with water transportation – whether it be river, lake or ocean – has been noted for severity, cruelty and the extreme penalty for those who worked in the capacity of menials’ (92). He depicted the roustabouts who were working the freight on the boats and ‘were treated worse than beasts of burden’ (92). According to James, the roustabouts were forced to carry ‘tremendous loads’ while being surveilled by a foreman who ‘stood by with a pistol and a long graduated hickory or oak club’ (92). James noted that the labourers were intimidated by what the white men called an ‘N-Teaser’ [the use of the initial N is my own change; the original document used the full word]: a name that by itself inflicts pain and testifies to the regime of racial violence and hierarchy (92). James called these white foremen ‘ruffians’ who ‘terrorized’ the ‘rousty’ toward ‘abject slavery’ (92). According to James, the white foremen used to beat, shoot and knock the men overboard ‘for any attempt to show resentment’ (92). The longshoremen who James spent time with on the

docks in Jacksonville, Savannah, New Orleans and Charleston from the 1920s to the 1940s ‘are among the hardest-working people in the nation’ (92). He stressed that while physical violence was less common during his 1940s visits, ‘the verbal abuse often gets terrific’ (92). As a college student James worked on a ship during one of his summer vacations and he documented the violence he witnessed during his employment (93).

Based on those experiences, James believed that he might find similar richness in Alabama coal mining towns and among the longshoremen working along the Savannah River. In *Stars in de Elements*, he mentioned public works sites such as ‘the road, river, mill, foundry, field turpentine camp’ as places ‘where the work songs have developed’ but also as places where ‘some of the most deplorable acts of social and economic violence have been inflicted upon the black men who worked in them’ (91). Given his emphasis on the connection between the violence and the songs, it seems that James aimed to reclaim these places as part of an African American music legacy. James’s intervention was necessary at that time and for years to come: he resisted and rejected the reimagining of such sites, and the labour they involved, through a prism of nostalgia which served to distract from the abuse and racial violence that occurred there. This tendency to nostalgia was especially problematic in representations of the US waterways, and particularly the Mississippi River. As Thomas Ruys Smith explains, there is a historical tension around the representation and the role of the Mississippi River in dominant (white) public and cultural consciousness. Smith notes that ‘its waters were freighted with a spirit of nostalgia for life – particularly Southern life – before the war’ (*The Mississippi* 24) which was characterised as a ‘space of white male power and play’ but that ‘violence engulfed the river’ (*River of Dreams* 136).

The term nostalgia did appear in James’s writings about the river, but as a concept it was far removed from the kind that Ruys Smith conceived in the shape of white Southern masculinity or the kind that has been associated with confederacy narratives of the Lost



Cause.<sup>82</sup> James's conceptualisation of the river was similar to the way Paul Gilroy uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' to frame the idea of the ship which was central to his conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic: it was a vessel that carried and facilitated the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage, but is also something that enables other forms of movement and exchanges of ideas, processes and identities across, beyond and against defined geopolitical borders, nation states and paradigms of power and subjugation. Gilroy describes the ship as a 'living, micro-cultural, micro political system in motion' (4). James, like Gilroy, attempted to reclaim the river, to discuss it as the site of violence it was and to confront its role in the history of slavery and the exploitation of Black labour, but also to frame it as an enclave where radical ideas and practices took shape among the 'troubadours of toil' across generations. Epithets like 'troubadours of toil' which were used by James when he discussed Black workers' contribution to music are examples of James's unique poetics in his assessments of Black experience and culture. His poetic conceptualisation transcended the oppressive conditions which he detected and which were inseparable from the songs, but it also resisted the popular, often stereotypical and derogatory characterisations of Black people. The idea of nostalgia also encompasses feelings of pain or longing and the desire to return somewhere and in this sense nostalgia seemed to be generative in James's practice and pursuit of ancestral heritage, memory and tradition. Nostalgia, it can be argued, is an intimate sentiment in James's writing that encompasses the pain but also celebrates the resistance and perseverance and above all the ingenuity and creativity ingrained in songs and music.

---

<sup>82</sup> Garry W. Gallagher discusses the emergence of the term in the decades following the surrender at Appomattox whereby ex-confederates 'nurtured a public memory of the Confederacy that placed their wartime sacrifice and shattering defeat in the best possible way'. Their interpretation, he argues, 'addresses the nature of antebellum Southern society and the institution of slavery, the constitutionality of secession, the causes of the Civil War, the characteristics of their wartime, and the reasons for their defeat' (1).

For example, in *Stars in de Elements* (90-91), James confronted what Hartman defines in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) as ‘elusive emancipation’ when he writes that the emancipated enslaved person was made a ‘slave to a system rather than an individual’ who was ‘forced to live with an inferior status’ especially in the realm of labour that ‘involved nearly every form of exploitation and injustice’ (10). The men who owned the boats ‘had also owned the men who worked in them before the Civil War and emancipation’ which meant ‘that the men were never really emancipated’ (92). John Blassingame bluntly describes the racial atmosphere in Savannah in the period following emancipation by noting that the white people of Savannah ‘reluctantly accepted the abolition of slavery’ and ‘vowed never to accept blacks on equal terms’ (464). James described the sounds he heard from boatmen, roustabouts, longshoremen, raft-haulers and fishermen as the most plaintive and lonesome cries he had ever heard: ‘the cries seem to possess the echo of the water in them. They are filled with peculiar nostalgia.’ (22). James emphasised similar characteristics when he wrote that ‘long before, during, and after slavery, the Negro river singer was creating lonesome, strange, florid and coloratura cries about river, women, towns, money, saloons, boats, white men, and black men’ (31). The few photographs (all in black and white) that survived from James’s trips along the river ways serve to echo such sentiments. One narrow vertical frame reveals a plain landscape in which a long strip of grey murky water touches the sky of a similar shade, and a line of chuck-weeded land with a few distant trees crosses the two, divides them (fig. 3.4).

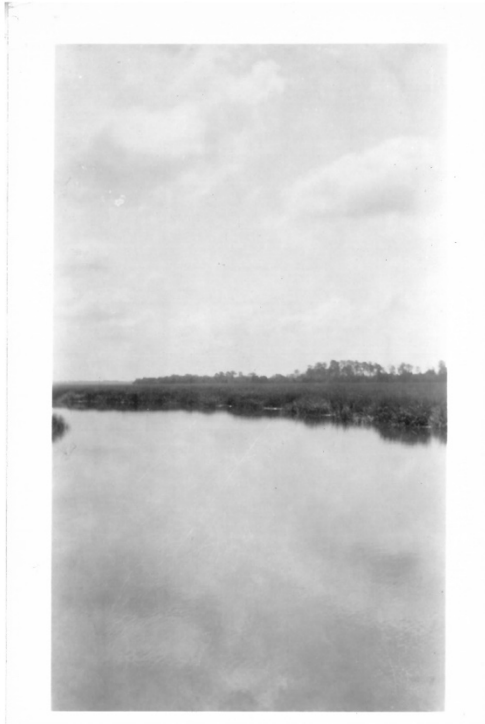


Fig. 3.4. James, Willis Laurence. Box 20 Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archives Atlanta, Georgia. [developed at Lollars, Birmingham, 1935].

A different, horizontal frame was taken from the river front, revealing an endless expanse of water with no land in sight beyond the edge of the land from which the photograph was taken (fig. 3.5).



Fig. 3.5. James, Willis Laurence. Box 20 Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archives Atlanta, Georgia. [developed at Lollars, Birmingham, 1935].

The image resembles the cover photograph for the '1619 Project' published as a special issue of the *New York Times* marking four hundred years since the first enslaved Africans were brought by force to the English colonies (Hannah-Jones, et al.). This photo, taken by Danielle Bowman from the shores of Hampton in Virginia where these enslaved people were brought off the ship, speculates on and imparts to us the enslaved Africans' point of view. The pain and the longing are etched in this view of the endless horizon which suggests the irreversible, the no-return voyage. There are no people in either of these frames, nor any fragment of human life. Another horizontal frame of the Savannah River taken by James pictures a broad part of the river where two vessels are visible: a small boat and what resembles a barge (fig. 3.6).

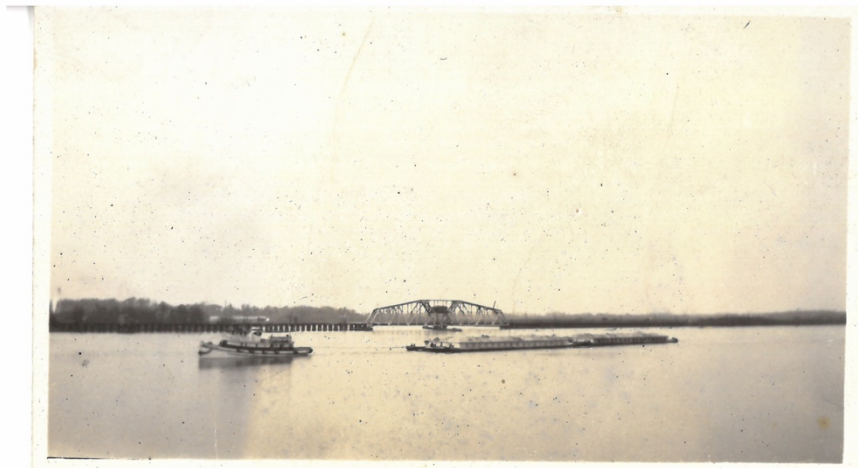


Fig. 3.6. James, Willis Laurence. Box 20 Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archives Atlanta, Georgia. [developed at Lollars, Birmingham, 1935].

In the background there is a bridge connecting two docks, and behind the bridge, barely visible, is a tree-filled area and some blurry structures (possibly dwellings or dock-related), but still no people are present. Looking at these photographs alongside James's depiction of the 'lonesome, strange' cries, we can assume that he wanted to trace the viewpoint of the singer, the Black worker. Yet, out of the 'lonesome, strange' cries James discerned themes which provide a richer, more complex picture of the interiority of these workers – their concerns, their social activities, their desires. This interiority is examined further in his depiction of the visit itself, in his dialogue with the longshoremen and the songs they sang. James described the

longshoremen he met on the docks. While James interpreted these songs as testimonies about an oppressive system, he accused white collectors – those from the past as well as his contemporaries – of treating these songs only as ‘pieces of art’ while ‘[ignoring] the sounding of truth at their very doorstep’ (91). James’s relentless efforts to upend white collectors’ practices and folklore scholarship involved his systematic characterisation of those practices using stereotypical imagery (albeit considered by many folklorists as unintentional) as a means to define his own unique contribution to the field. Folklorists, claims Patrick B. Mullen ‘have concentrated field research on black people who fit our preconceived ideas about the folk’ (2). He argues that the hegemonic stereotype of Black folk ‘had meant poor, uneducated, rural people’, adding that these stereotypes were considered valid until the 1960s (2-3). James’s documentation and treatment of Black people was nothing of that sort, even if they lived in rural, poverty-stricken areas with limited options of education.

In his attempt to reconstruct African American processes of community building post-emancipation, Blassingame stresses how Black workers organised in associations and quasi-unions as a means to ‘protect themselves from white prejudice, rapacious employers’ and, equally important, ‘to provide mutual aid and a richer social life’ (466). In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiment* Hartman develops the notion of an experiment in living, emphasising mutual aid associations and other modalities in which individuals and communities had been caring and organising as enslaved, emancipated and working class people. James’s collection and writings provide a window into intellectual and social spaces like those identified by Hartman, Blassingame and Woods: a world in which James and his contemporaries addressed political, professional, artistic and pedagogical aspirations against the oppressive milieu of white supremacy, disenfranchisement and segregation. Black leadership and community-building efforts were often missing from studies of rural African American communities in the South, as Simon Ottenberg claimed as early as 1959. He explains how these studies often deal

with caste and class and they consider economic and social problems. He also asserts that the studies ‘lack a sense of what for the rural Negro constitutes a community’ and that scholars of the social sciences rarely showed interest in rural Black leadership (with the exception of race relations scholars) (7). This omission and the need for a shift in perspective to one that is centred on the Black experience, as Ottenberg advocates, was at the heart of James’s practice and critique. James also put a spotlight on the interaction between self-fashioning and independence which was well exemplified by the local longshoremen he met.

James’s introduction to the longshoremen was made via two of James’s former schoolmates (from Morehouse) – Dean W. E. Payne and Reverend Levi M. Terrill. Terrill, who is also mentioned in the list of special acknowledgments in the preface to James’s book, was an educator and a pastor at the First Bryan Baptist Church in Savannah (1935-1943). James first attended a prayer meeting at this church before Terrill took him to meet Mannie Jackson – the president of the Savannah Longshoremen Local. Jackson and Terrill were key figures in their respective communities who showed appreciation for each other and took responsibility for caring for their members. Jackson, a fine singer himself (according to James), was the founder of the local and was ‘the most interesting man’ among the workers he met. James’s notes on the back of the portrait he took of Jackson stated that ‘he knows all about the life in the River front for fifty years. He is an inspiring figure too.’ Jackson spoke often about the years he had worked hard as a longshoreman, and how he had worked even harder since he became the president ‘trying to make some self-respect fo’ his people on de river’ (*Stars* 99).



Fig. 3.7. James, Willis Laurence. 'Mannie Jackson', n.d. Box 20 Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archives Atlanta, Georgia.

This notion of self-respect was well conveyed in the portrait of Jackson taken by James (fig. 3.7). The photograph is overexposed and blurry, but still one can notice that Jackson is wearing fine clothes – a dark-three piece suit, a white tie and a dark hat. His suit is decorated with a pin and it has a handkerchief in the pocket, and a watch or a medal is attached to the front buttons of his waistcoat. A ring adorns his finger and he is holding a

cigar. With our awareness of Jackson's emphasis on self-respect, we can assume that he was invested in how he wanted to be documented. Jackson 'opened his office and mind' to James (96). His office was a small space adjacent to a larger room where the men waited to be called to work. Their long hours waiting in this space were spent together in singing, an intimate experience to which James was privy during his stay. James's use of the dialect (Gullah) in these depictions and elsewhere in his manuscript was nothing like Joel Chandler Harris's racist endeavour to provide an idealised representation of what he called 'a genuine flavor of the old plantation' (Harris). Zora Neale Hurston, whom James appreciated and referred to as one of the most skilful folklorists in the United States, debunked the common myth that dialect was a carrier of authenticity and warned against the use of dialect by white people. She accused white collectors of intentionally writing speech errors into manuscripts, to convince their readers of African American inferiority. James's depiction of dialect was done with integrity in the tradition of Hurston's practice which she articulated in her essay 'Characteristics of Negro Expression'.

James described an episode in which the singing ritual started after one of the men in the waiting room approached Jackson and notified him that 'fess' an' 'rev' had arrived, and 'you know what dat mean. Dey want some sing.'. Jackson replied, 'git 'em a seat, an' take pain wid they comfort; dey our frien'' (96). This was followed by another ritual in which 'Snake', another key figure in the group, claimed he would not sing, and the rest of the men chided him by saying 'we ha' to see 'bout dat' (96). In a few seconds, Jackson selected the song and the pitch while James, Terrill and others (who went by the names 'Kid Jeff' Smith, 'Big Gator', 'Crit' Crittenden and Jim Green) stood around the oil heater facing Jackson, with the view of the murky river in the window behind him. Snake, whom James described as 'mean, dangerous, poetic and lovable' sat on the side 'with a cold glint in his small eyes and a sinister expression' (97). He would stand silently, clearing his throat and shifting his legs with



each verse sung, and by the fourth verse he would break his silence and ‘rise with a jump and let out: “hol’ em, hol’ em. Stop! Y’ain’t sing em right. Y’ain’t ketch de true way. Sing ’em over. I jine em”’ (97). James explained that the moment Snake joined with his beautiful Gullah dialect was a sign that singing was going well and that ‘the day has just begun’ (97).

James’s visit took place during a strike which meant that the longshoremen were not working, but they were alert, actively withdrawing their work. The sessions that James witnessed and took part in lasted for hours, and he and Terrill both joined in at times. The longshoremen sang shanties (chanteys) ‘that were very old and had passed out of use with the cotton jacks’, religious songs, songs that spoke of water, and the men even borrowed from old British seamen songs and created their own variations (97-99). The longshoremen also sang many union songs, whether these were central in their repertoire or motivated by the context of the strike. Some celebrated the mere idea of collective organising – a modality based on solidarity and care – such as this one:

All I want is Union,  
Oh Lawd! Hanh!  
Union make me happy,  
Oh Lawd! Hanh! (96)

Another song expressed resentment of the white employer – the cap’ m. It testified to the structures of exploitation and oppression marked by capitalism and white supremacy. It voices the agency inherent to the right to strike, to cease working, or to resort to violence if needed, both as an act of refusal and a demand for change.

Dam de cap’ m!  
Dam de comp’ny too!  
I’ m ntachal bawn eas’ man  
Thoo an’ thoo.  
White folks don’ cuss me!  
Done buke me ‘round!  
I’ ll take dis here pick  
An’ tare yo’ down!  
Cap’ m, cap’ m, hear me,  
Listen to what I say:

Cap'm, cap'm, hear me,  
Dis here's my last day. (102)

The most powerful song according to James in terms of its performative execution as a collective was 'Baby Ann'. James noted that this was not a well-known song, and that the only person who knew it in its entirety refused to give away his name.

She don't draw but a foot o' water –  
My Baby Ann  
She belong to de cap'm's daughter –  
My Baby Ann,  
Load her when she come  
Load her when she come,  
An' send her gwine home! (100)

In James's depiction, the performance of this song led to an extraordinary moment of culmination that requires full description here. James description includes references to different sites associated with African American life, labour and movement at different points in history (related to ships, trains, cotton fields). James expressed the sonic and sensual experience that transpired in the room, as follows:

As the music reaches a well tide, the room changed from a mere location into a moving, riding ship at anchor. The air seemed to take on the reek of the vessels long used to carry the multi-odored goods of the world. The feet of the men beat out a wild, syncopating rhythm that sounded like the wheels of a freight car moving empty in a distant night against loose-jointed rails. Each face caught the magic of nostalgia and swelled with the zeal born of creation. Even the sweat ran down and the jacks cracked. The men were loading cotton – "jackin' cotton twll de rivet seams cried and bust!". (100)

James's vivid depiction demonstrates the potency of these men in their seizing of this space in the office, and through collective action and shared experience their shielding of the same space from the violence of white supremacy and segregation that raged in the world outside Jackson's office.

James's visit was cut short abruptly without a chance to say goodbye, when that external reality intruded into the longshoremen's space. 'One cold, bleak morning I went down to the headquarters, as was my custom. A strange sight greeted me', James wrote (100).

The room was filled with ‘strange-faced delegates’ and Jackson was delivering a fiery speech. Snake met James at the door ‘unsmilingly’ and explained that ‘de meetin’ on. Ain’t got no mo’ time da sing. White man ain’t pay us right. We got to meet the business’. At that point, the situation bore a resemblance to the scenario depicted in one of the songs: James noticed that Snake was carrying a stick and when asked why he was carrying it, Snake replied ‘I go keep Mannie safe. I go beat hell out em if dey boter Mannie’ (100). Note the similarity to words in the song: ‘White folks don’ cuss me! / Done buke me ‘round! / I’ll take dis here pick / An’ tare yo’ down!’ (102). Snake ‘raised a sawed-off pool cue and spat out an excited, violent warning’. The man who agitated Snake and ‘had spoken out of turn’ became silent, noted James (101). James retreated and left the next morning as he had planned.

Though we write to each other, we have never met again, or maybe we have. I am sure that on some cold, rainy, winter days those men hear and see ‘Rev’ Terrill and ‘Fess’ James there singing with them, even as I can from this distance. (101)

Similar themes and more details of James’s collecting practice can be found in his stories about his trips to Alabama mining towns that were part of this collecting expedition. James described the coal mining town near Birmingham where he spent significant time as one of the most interesting and fruitful places he had ever visited: ‘There I was brought face to face with creative forces working together in a perfect pattern of production’ (150). James’s writings about the music of these workers emphasise the collaborative and communal elements embedded in the making of their songs without neglecting to stress the conditions of exploitation faced by these Black individuals and communities. The histories of the mining towns date back to the eighteenth-century with the reliance on enslaved labour providing the blueprint for these towns right through to the end of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth-century. This blueprint shaped the exploitative working and living conditions in these towns – poor housing, racial violence, segregation and neglect. This context is pertinent to

James's documentation of the African American communities in the various mining towns he visited in Alabama, which included photographs, songs and written text. As Ronald L. Lewis argues, the coal mining industry was rooted in Southern slave society 'whose very foundations were the economic and ideological imperatives of black bondage' thus providing the framework in which 'labor relations evolved in the southern coalfield' (3). The earliest evidence of enslaved mining labour was found in eastern Virginia around the year 1760, and the industry expanded in the first half of the eighteenth-century 'using slaves in every capacity' (6). Lewis's research details the practices of monitoring the labour and production of the enslaved, the system of punishment and deprivation, and the confined dwellings designed to prevent the escape of the enslaved workers (9). According to Lewis, following the Civil War 'the companies employed [as] many newly freed blacks as possible rather than replacing them with white' (6). Coal mining was a dangerous activity that required certain skills. The fact that Black workers were re-hired attests to their acquired specialist skills and knowledge and also shows that the premise that Black lives were disposable was not abolished with slavery, as further evidenced by the exploitation of these labourers for lower wages and poor living conditions.<sup>83</sup> The fact that much of the enslaved labour was replaced with convict labour reaffirms how certain labour continued to be forced on Black people and remained relatively free or low-cost for the contractors. The continuity between slavery and convict leasing was striking, Lewis observes, with its 'adaption to the needs of a nascent industrial capitalism in its aggressively exploitative stage' (14). Lewis emphasises that while some habits, thoughts and attitudes of workers might have originated in agricultural slavery 'it took nourishment and flourished in the New South's most dangerous labor-intensive industries, especially mining' (14). Designated 'quarters' which were built for the enslaved (hired and otherwise) near the mines and closely

---

<sup>83</sup> In some cases, as Lewis shows, the enslaved mine workers were hired 'because the inherent danger of these occupations posed too much of a threat to a salt company's own slaves'. Hired enslaved workers, he explains 'usually were insured, however, and those who were killed or injured on the job were replaced by new men' (Lewis 6-8).

monitored could have provided the initial model that was then used by other nineteenth-century industrial companies. These company towns were established from the mid-nineteenth-century and continued to develop and expand in the first half of the twentieth-century before their decline in the 1950s.

Leifur Magnusson's 1920 study of the issue of housing in these towns, conducted two decades prior to James's visit, described 'the isolation of the average mining town, its dependence upon the one industry of mining, and frequently its impermanence and almost universal lack of self-government' (215). Revealing is the high degree of dependence of the labourers in these towns and their vulnerability to exploitation by the company operators. The study provides further details about the average company mining town as having 'few of the amenities of ordinary community life. There is a dull uniformity in the appearance of the houses and an absence of trees and natural vegetation. Streets and alleys are open dirt roads almost without exception. Sidewalks are very rare' (215). James's photographs of several of these mining towns two decades after this report reaffirmed the bleak reality in which little had changed. Moreover, Magnusson's study noted that 'the desirability of locating the houses near the mines has frequently been secured at the sacrifice of health and comfort', which could lead to overexposure to gas and smoke, and other side effects (216). James was fully aware of this chronic danger to the workers and their families. He documented an example on the back of a photograph he took of Bradford School in Dixiana, noting 'It is too dangerously near the mines rock piles. Fresh rock is dumped on this pile all day long' (James 'Bradford School').

In the 1930s African Americans comprised fifty-three percent of the coal mining labour force in the United States, and ninety percent of the convicts who were forced to work on the mines. Although there was segregation in these mining towns from the end of the nineteenth-century, with separate neighbourhoods and schools, Magnusson's study did not

disclose differences in amenities or other conditions between the white and African American communities. However, James's photographs of the African American communities does not resemble the planned community with well-structured dwelling that characterizes the white mining town that were built and promoted in this period. It rather shows the ramshackle houses in a cluttered and unorganised layout with no visible amenities, paved streets or sidewalks (figs. 3.8 and 3.9).



Fig. 3.8. (left) James, 'Edgewater Mines in Distance', 1939, Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Fig 3.9. (right) James, 'Dixiana Alabama', 1939, Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

From James's notes and manuscript, I have determined that the four towns were all in Jefferson County. The town of Fairfield, probably the largest of all and the closest to Birmingham, was founded in 1910 by the Tennessee Coal & Iron Company (TCI) and designed with the intention to house a workforce of sixteen thousand 'skilled and largely white' workers who could afford to purchase their houses (Maloney). Following a series of strikes, an investigation initiated by the House of Representatives committee, and the publication of a four-volume study of *Labor Conditions in the Iron and Steel Industry* which had revealed abuse and bad practice, US Steel 'used Fairfield as visible evidence of its new welfare policies and concern for its employees' (Crawford 84). This form of welfare capitalism was partly intended to counter trade unionism and was evident in various efforts

and initiatives in design that included planting trees and shrubs to provide shaded areas and building houses in a modern style with improved plumbing and central heating. The mining company constructed parkways, parks, playgrounds, athletics fields and tennis courts, as well as churches and public libraries. All of these amenities were absent from the areas that James had been to, which only demonstrates that welfare capitalism was not intended to benefit the Black workers' community. During the First World War with the growing demand for coal, TCI built an adjacent planned community known as Westfield for 'lower income unskilled black and immigrant workers' (Maloney). Fairfield expanded in the 1920s in accordance with segregation laws, with the building of new and separate housing and other facilities for white and Black people.

Comparing James's photographs of a school in Fairfield and a school in Bradford (figs. 3.10 and 3.11), both for Black pupils, highlights the differences between these communities in terms of the company's investment. In the first picture, Fairfield's school seems to be located in proximity to residential or other public structures. Bradford's school is isolated from residential settings and is too close to the mines, hence the rock pile visible behind. The Fairfield school is a better-quality structure and is made of planks of wood supported by bricks fixed to the ground, while Bradford's school is simply built from untreated wood planks on simple supports that can be moved or removed easily, like many of the houses seen in other black communities which James had visited, evidencing the lack of investment and the short-sighted commitment. Contested race relations and segregationist ideology were also used by the companies to sabotage workers' efforts to organise and unionise, but at the same time, as Robert J. Norrell demonstrates, the unions 'gave white workers new power to enforce job discrimination, thus severely curtailing black opportunities' (670). That meant, as Norrell further argues, that such gains at the expense of

Black workers ‘provided whites with a clear *economic* stake at preserving racial discrimination’ (670).



Fig. 3.10 Willis Laurence James, ‘Elementary School at Fairfield’, Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Fig. 3.11 James, ‘Bradford School’, Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

James identified three factors that anchored the group-consciousness character of song and music in the Black areas in these company towns: the first is that the people in these communities were ‘living in the same area in close formation’; second, they were ‘bound together by the common necessity of being members of the coal miners’ union’; and thirdly, ‘in the case of the T.C.I company [were] encouraged in the matter of singing some of their own songs, especially those that are related to the mine and to the life of the mining camp’ (151). These three factors were painfully rooted in the segregated reality, the historical profitability of the exploitation of Black labour and its impact on spatial and social planning.

Although James studied the challenging living conditions of the workers, he insisted on seeing beyond these conditions to highlight the way his community came together through singing: a ‘song galaxy’, he called it. This song galaxy – which was a typical singing session – did not resemble anything James had experienced before and he made sure no detail escaped him. It started with a collective prayer led by the trainer. The singers, between four and a dozen



of them, would rise and stand in a line to sing a familiar song. At one point the trainer would move to the end of the line, facing the same direction as the singers but standing a little to the fore in order to be seen. The trainer would bring his hand down with a ‘rather violent chopping motion’ (157). This gesture would lead to absolute silence. With a firm, authoritative manner, he would tell the singers what he wants to be sung. He would then explain further and sing by example until the men caught on and the song gathered momentum. All the while, the trainer would scold the singers with humour and encourage them to improve their singing and to keep up the rhythm until he performed the aforementioned gesture to signal his approval that the singing is to his satisfaction. This would continue until the singers ‘relax[ed] into joyous, almost shouting type of singing, patting the feet, working the shoulders, swaying the body at will, flexing the knees, beaming in ecstasy’ (160). At that moment they would move on to another song, singing as freely as possible, creating new forms and variations. A training session did not end formally but rather it fizzled out, James noted. James’s detailed and vivid descriptions of these sessions not only provide a rich picture of the setting, choreography and development of the song, but they also contribute to the sense of pride he identified among the workers/singers. These depictions highlighted the collaborative effort embedded in their singing practices and the creative ingenuity and novelty expressed in the lyrics and composition, and the rhythmic and performative execution.

In *Stars in de Elements* there are specific accounts of several individuals who exemplify the unique social and musical characters James identified among the longshoremen in Savannah and the miners in Alabama. The book was published with none of the photographs that James had taken. The little notes James had written on the backs of the photographs certainly echo his grant mission statement to capture ‘intimate domestic life’ and ‘lifestyle’. Some of the photographs depict the settings as I’ve discussed above, but most of them are portraits of the men and women he met. These portraits, which I was able to identify

and match with his written recollections, are a precious window into the notions of pride and self-fashioning as articulated by the individuals concerned. As James explained in his grant application, 'it is not enough to merely collect these songs' (xiii). He was equally concerned with African American people's 'costumes, modes of expression, intimate domestic life and attitudes' (xiii). Cureau reflects on the way in which James took note of people's 'rituals, lifestyles, dress, walk or behavior' and mannerisms, stating that he 'was adept at character portrayal' (168). James's portraits of men and women, like those of many African American photographers (professional and amateur alike), reflect what Earnestine Lovelle Jenkins describes as 'pride in one's work and a strong sense of self-respect, irrespective of the work black men performed' (213). To borrow from Deborah Willis's writings on the work of Black photographers, the pictures James captured 'did much more than record the presence of black men and women in America' because 'they became a communal image of prestige and power' (Willis 'Representing the New Negro' 18). These notions of pride and self-respect manifest in the individual's choice of clothing, their bodily position, and are also voiced in their own words which James cared to write on the back of the photographs. These notions are also shown in the sites which James or the photographed persons chose for their portrait – a home, a church, a car, at work – each site signifying a different kind of self-sufficiency, an intimacy, a system of support and safety for the individual but also as a part of a community. After all, for James, his subjects were not merely 'raw material', as many white collectors treated the musicians they met. James saw in each one of his interlocutors a fellow composer or musician. These archival photos and documents, juxtaposed with and read alongside his manuscript, enabled me to tentatively construct biographical representations of the people who otherwise would remain an anonymous, generalised group assembled under the concept of 'folk'.

In Alabama, James took the portraits of men and women at various places across the mines, granting equal status to each place that constituted the miners' landscape. For example, Ella Madison from Dixiana was photographed in front of her home (fig. 3.12) and standing on the doorstep of the miners' church (fig. 3.13).



Fig. 3.12. (left) James, 'Ella Madison, in Front of Her Home, Dixiana Alabama', Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Fig. 3.13. James, 'Ella Madison in Front of the Miners Church, Dixiana Alabama', Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Private houses and churches were both sites where James was privy to the lives and songs of the community. However, James's close-up frame of Ella Madison reveals little of the church or her home; photographing her on the doorstep helps to safeguard the intimate nature of these spaces, preventing a voyeuristic gaze from intruding on them. James described Madison as a gifted singer and composer. According to his notes, Madison lived in Dixiana or

Bradford and she did not complete her studies.<sup>84</sup> In *Stars in de Elements*, James argued that work songs were created by men and that ‘women and children have not contributed to the repertoire as they have in the cases of the religious songs and other folk songs’ (69). Yet he also claimed that when women started singing the blues, ‘a new day was born for the further development of the blues’ (57). He mentioned the impact of Mammie Smith, Bessie Smith, Trixie Smith, Ida Cox, Ethel Waters and Ma Rainey – he remembered hearing Ma Rainey with great excitement as a child, for she ‘composed blues every time she sang’ (60). Madison was one of the few women from his collecting trips about whom he wrote in some detail; other women were given credit for the lyrics, composition or variations they sang or wrote for James, but no other information was provided about them. James noted the lyrics to Madison’s variation of the song ‘Signs of Judgment’ and wrote that ‘she added many of these verses to this well-known song. She is a very gifted person [...]’ (115). Furthermore, the lyrics of a song Madison composed and wrote appear in *Stars in de Elements*: ‘No Money Blues’ reveals a sensual, heart-breaking rendition of separation, loneliness, painful longing, and inescapable poverty (159).

*No Money Blues*

I ain’ got no money, baby, no friend to take me in. (2x)  
And when I meet you on the street, my trouble start all over again.

Last night I was wondering ‘round, blue sky coverin’ my head. (x2)  
Thinking ‘bout my sweet baby, and wishin’ I was dead.

Remember the night we parted, my love was ridin’ high. (2x)  
When you said you didn’t want me no more, baby, I prayed God I could die.  
Now Listen here, sweet baby, I’ll love you just the same. (2x)  
I love the way you kiss me, and I love to hear you call my name.

You’re just a sweet lovin’ daddy, don’ mean no harm at all. (2x)  
‘Cause you know I’ll always love you, and be ready to catch you when you fall.

---

<sup>84</sup> While contemporary maps show Dixiana as a small rural community seven miles from Bradford, other sources indicate that Dixiana is another name for Bradford. S. Geological Survey. Geographic Names Phase I data compilation (1976-1981). 31-Dec-1981. Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files. In some instances, from 1:62,500 scale or 1:250,000 scale maps.

Now tell me, baby, won't you try me one more time.  
Now tell me, baby, won't you try me one more time.  
I swear I won't break your heart,  
And forever you'll be mine. (139)

The two portraits of Madison were taken at different times, perhaps on different visits, as we know that James returned to the town several times during the early 1940s. Juxtaposing these two different songs with these two different portraits, one at the church and one at home, invites a meditation on James's intention to capture the complexity of Madison's poetics and sonic performative personality: at home versus the church; the private versus the communal; the raw, exposed and vulnerable emotions and expressions with which she wrote and composed versus the variation she added to the widely shared and practised song.

Mose Smith was James's guide at Edgewater mine (fig. 3.14). James's choice of words here is significant. He did not use the term *informant* which was common and preferred by collectors in popular disciplines like ethnomusicology, anthropology and ethnography of the period. At the back of the portrait, he wrote: 'He is a miner. I have not been able to get him to let me take this picture in mining clothes' (James 'Mose Smith'). This note recorded by James reveals how Smith took an active part in the way he was inscribed into the archive, setting the terms upon which his portrait would be taken. James, I speculate, was humble enough to learn from this and leave this trace of their exchange.



Fig. 3.14. James, 'Mose Smith, My Guide, Edgewater'. Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Smith is seen wearing fine clothes, dark ironed trousers and a white ironed shirt. This portrait like the one of Jackson is overexposed, so some details are difficult to discern but the contours of a tie are just discernible. Given our awareness of Smith's sense of agency and determination as to how he wanted to be documented, we can assume that he or James deliberately chose his position standing alongside the car. While not as luxurious as the car in

James Van Der Zee's famous photograph of the fur-wearing 'Couple' (1932) from Harlem, the car in Smith's portrait symbolises a certain status and indicates material ownership, independence and mobility. These are connotations which are also apparent in other photographs by African American photographers such as the portraits of Robert McNeill in 'New Car, Richmond' (1938) and Gordon Parks.

Cleveland Perry, also known as 'Singin' Perry', left an unmistakable mark on James, who wrote about him extensively, referring particularly to his capability as a trainer and musician (fig. 3.15). James took Perry's portrait in front of what might be his home. Perry is seen wearing a three-piece suit.



Fig. 3.15. Willis Laurence James, 'Clive Perry' Willis Laurence James Collection, Spelman College Archive, Box 18.

Did James want to capture Perry in his mining outfit, like Smith, or did he decide to support and enable the subject's agency and control over the representation? Or was it Perry who directed the exchange and set the terms of his portrait? From James's notes and manuscript

we learn that Perry was born in Marengo county and was forty-eight years old when he met James. He left school before finishing the third grade and had never sung before 1920. James described him as ‘an untutored genius of melody and of insight into his environment’ (152). Perry wrote, composed and sang many union songs about the mines and the working conditions which led to him being fired. On the back of the portrait on the right, James wrote ““Clive” Perry – my old friend and most gifted song writer in Edgewater. My camera went “haywire”. However, you can see him. He was fired for singing sermons songs. He is a genius.’ (James box 18). According to James, one of Perry’s greatest delights, and also where his talent manifested most powerfully, was improvising and putting original words into spirituals, transforming them into what he called ‘work spiritual[s]’ or ‘union spiritual[s]’. James documented an example of Perry’s adaptation of a jubilee song that was popular among the miners, ‘O, Didn’t It Rain’ (153-4):

*Original Version*

O, hear me Jesus, hear me,  
Hear me ef yo’ please.  
Ef you don’t hear me standin’  
I’ll fall down on my knees.

*Perry’s version*

Dere’s people, dey don’t like me  
‘Cause I’m a union man  
Go’n stay in line wid de union  
Ed I die wid my card in my han’.

*Chorus*

O’ didn’t it rain, children,  
Didn’t hit rain fer my lawd?  
O’ didn’t hit rain, Law,  
O’ didn’t hit rain?

While Perry had adapted the verses, he believed the chorus needed no changing as it was already adequate for his purpose, as he explained:

Well there’s some folks that wants to work in the mines but they won’t join the union so they can help themselves. I had to change them verses so as I could get them scabs good and told. Well, when hit come to the chorus I didn’t had



to change another word cause it stuck them just right. You see that say plain that day is coming when these scabs going be out in the world with no protection, just standing there with no protection, just standing there with trouble coming down on him. Going to be just like when Noah told de folks about the ark. (154)

James commented that such a practice of adapting songs ‘is a strong index to the man’s creative abilities. It also shows what actually happens to the songs of the Negro as they pass through the hands of highly gifted people who are honest in their efforts at self-expression’ (153).

### **Performing the collection and advancing new methods**

Dwight Conquergood criticises the hierarchy and erasure of various ‘forms of knowing’ that were established through the enlightenment project of modernity: ‘Marching under the banner of science and reason, it has disqualified and repressed other forms of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies’ (146). What is left out by such ‘epistemic violence’, he continues, is ‘the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised coexperience, covert – and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out’ (146). These characteristics listed by Conquergood are intrinsic to folk songs and the practices of collecting and preserving performed by James. They correspond to the concept of ‘orature’ as a ‘liminal space between speech and writing, performance and print, where these channels of communication constantly overlap, penetrate and mutually produce one another’ (151). As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o suggests, such communication ‘transcends the narrow binaries of the written and the oral’ (119). The particular temporality of performative expression and experience and this liminal space between speech (and song) and writing became central to James’s theory and method of collecting and preserving folk songs and music. The concept of preservation occupied a pivotal place in James’s writing and also in his exchanges with the people he met,

for example when he wrote about dance music and the scarcity of the older songs and styles during his trips in the 1940s. He noted that ‘the Negro has never felt called upon to preserve any one dance [musical expression that encourages movement] over a long period of time. His urge to create new ones has always been his drive [...]’ (43-4). This observation highlights how performance and repertoire are dynamic, ever-changing and evolving – which then positions preservation as something that enforces suspense and stagnation and is contradictory to progress. In James’s words: ‘when it comes to Negro folk music, much more is heard by ear than is seen when the notes have been set’ (190). James’s work highlights the differences and challenges between listening in real-time and capturing things on paper, through musical or textual notations. These gaps, along with his limited access to recording equipment, led to James’s development and extensive use of the lecture-performance genre. He often explained his ideas by demonstrating them with his voice, and sometimes with the help of students and the choirs he directed. This emphasis on performative, ephemeral (not written) forms of preservation and memorialisation through transmission also framed his position as a music professor, conductor and arranger of music as central to his objective of preservation, especially concerning religious folk songs that he exceptionally loved.

First-hand observation was essential to James in the field and in the classroom, as well as in the rehearsal and concert halls. As Cureau states, James ‘inspired in generations of students and audiences a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Negro’s contribution to American music and culture’ (143). This reading corroborates James’s statement about the role these institutions had: ‘Indeed Fisk, Hampton, Tuskegee, and Atlanta have without exception been bulwarks of tradition in keeping the religious music of the Negro before the Negro youth and general public’ (199).

As part of his unique approach to preservation and sharing his rich collection, the greater part of which was never recorded, James pioneered a particular format of lecture-demonstration

centred on performance. In this format, James introduced his study of Black folk music and, like Zora Neale Hurston, provided an embodied demonstration of music, songs and gestures. In some cases used student chorus to demonstrate too. From the 1940s until his passing in 1966, James was invited to give demonstration lectures throughout the country and abroad, a progression which is essential to the case of establishing his status as an authority in the field. Evidence of his popularity as a lecturer and performer is plentiful in his collection. James mastered this lecture format until it became his identifying mark, and a manifestation of his ingenuity can be found in *Afro-American Music Sound Recording: a Demonstration Recording by Dr. Willis James* – a two-record set released posthumously by Folkways Records and Arche Recordings in 1970. In this recorded lecture-performance lasting an hour and forty-five minutes, James devoted significant time to the discussion of religious music. He suggested that the majority of the spirituals were taken from the scriptures. One of the reasons for that, he explained, is that Black people ‘know about religion by hearing ministers preach. And they preached and sang consequently’ (*Afro-American Music*). James stressed the close-knit relationship between song and prayer among preachers and the church’s congregation. Black spirituality, argues Diana L. Haynes, had an emphasis on ‘God (God-centeredness) and Scripture (biblical rootedness)’ but at the same time focused on ‘community, and with its orientation toward liberation and justice’ (55). This spirituality, she suggests, ‘was expressed in powerful liturgies that emphasized prayer, song, fervent preaching and testifying, and above all else, soul-stirring music that lifted the participants out of their seats to dance in ecstatic joy and praise of God’ (55). Haynes’s discussion of the Black church and Black spirituality is framed within the context of the Civil Rights Movement and the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. However, as I will demonstrate with James’s analysis of religious music, some of the characteristics Haynes describes did exist earlier. James demonstrated, and explained through

song, several examples that show how rich and creative African American religious expression was.

As Cureau suggests, both James's manuscript and demonstration recording reveal how he was 'especially attentive to, and fascinated by, folk speech, specifically, dialect: the rhythms, nuances of color, inflections of words, and he regarded these as a distinctive feature of folk culture' (168). The following example is a transcript of James singing what he described as a 'sorrow song'. He identified African characteristics within its sound and focused on the contribution of Black dialect to the song and its message:

My mother is gone,  
Ain't but me one;      (3 times)  
Oh, Lord, ain't but me one.

As James noted, 'The most interesting thing about this song is the language' (*Afro-American Music*). Most people, he explained, would say 'Ain't but me. But [here the] "me" [is being] emphasizes with the "one"'. James's focus on this two-line song and the minor addition of a single word, 'one', brings to mind Hurston's essay 'Characteristics of Negro Expression'. This essay was published during James's active years as a collector. Hurston described additions or alteration as a 'will to adorn' and explained that it may not 'meet conventional standards' but does demonstrate how 'the American Negro has done wonders to the English language' (Hurston 'Characteristics' 49-50). In the case of this song refers to capturing the emotional and existential state of being left feeling detached with no loved ones in the world. It is an expression of mourning and loss. 'Ain't but me one' finds its origins in slavery. In a 1996 BBC television programme, 'Through Many Dangers: The Story of Gospel Music', Reverend Robert Butler Jr. and his mother Lillie Mae Butler sang the song together.<sup>85</sup> Reverend Butler gave the following explanation:

---

<sup>85</sup> Lillie Mae Butler was born in 1915 in North Carolina. She moved to New York in 1944. She sang gospel and spirituals and played the electric guitar regularly at Brooklyn's Greater Free Gift Baptist Church. She made her concert debut in 1990 at the age of seventy-six. In 1994 she was introduced to the People's Hall of Fame of New York City for her musical contribution. She has 'bestowed the gospel traditions of three generations of Butlers,

That's what I love about the songs we sang. We've got the history of the song. Ain't But Me One is a slave song. That song was written way back when the gentleman slave was brought over, and his family was on the next ship coming, and they all died. And that's when the song popped out... Ain't be me now. It's only me now. (Butler 'Through Many Dangers')

Therefore the single word 'one' added to the song represents more than 'a' loss of a family member under natural circumstances; it carries the magnitude of the loss enforced upon the millions that were kidnapped from their homeland in the African continent and taken away from their families. The precarity of African American lives was maintained for many generations after these captives arrived in North America during the domestic slave trade. Arthur C. Jones' analysis of the song 'A Motherless Child' addresses this history and is equally relevant to 'Ain't But Me One': 'The fact that children born in slavery were so frequently torn from their mothers and families made the personal grief of the "motherless child" alarmingly familiar during the period of American Slavery' (19). Nearly two decades before James's rendition of this song, in 1943 he and Lewis Wade Jones (Fisk) documented and recorded an a cappella version of it at Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia, performed by the Mixed Quartet of First Baptist Church of Byron, Georgia, led by Mrs. Beatie Gay. Listening to their performance enhances the analysis of the song in which one lead singer communicates the collective experience shared by others – in this case, the singers in the quartet.

One of the most important examples James provided in his lecture-performance was 'My God Is a Rock' which he defined as a jubilee song sermon. In *Stars in de Elements* James described the jubilee genre as being a 'striking example of the Negro preacher's influence in the development of the religious music of the Negro' (118). Such songs were musically and poetically unique. Their characteristics were shaped by 'an exceptionally gifted person' leading them and they were therefore unique to the place and time in which they were sung (118). The

---

including her son Robert [who sang and spoke with her on the BBC programme], a Pentecostal minister, one of eight surviving children'. (See Clarke 22.)

specific song performed in *Afro-American Music* ‘tells the whole gospel situation and preaches a piece of religious convictions through song. It has to do with the story of Jesus, as a boy in the temple’ (*Afro-American Music*). However, right from the first phrase and throughout the song some terminology stands out: ‘poll taxes’, ‘lawyers an’ de doctors’, ‘state an’ county doctor’, ‘state and county judge’ (James *Stars* 118). James defined this as a song of ‘conviction, a doctrine, a belief’, that introduced ‘a complete transposition of the time of Jesus’, ‘bringing it precisely up to the moment for him... this is real’ (*Afro-American Music*). Like James’s interpretation of this song, tenor singer and activist Paul Robeson argues that all spirituals are testaments to African American lived experience. In his 1958 book and semi-autobiography *Here I Stand*, Robeson writes:

the power of spirit that our people have is intangible, but it is a great force that must be unleashed in the struggle of today. A spirit of steadfast determination, exaltation in the face of trials – it is the very soul of our people that has been formed through all the long and weary years of our march toward freedom [...]. That spirit lives in our people’s songs – in the sublime grandeur of “Deep River”, in the driving power of “Jacob’s Ladder”, in the militancy of “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho”, and in the poignant beauty of all our spirituals. (100)

Understanding spirituals and their use by drawing on Robeson’s and James’s insights reaffirms my earlier observation on the ways in which folk songs challenge the doxa of preservation and slip away from preservationist attempts to freeze the songs, since they transform across time and place and with the personalities or communities who sing them. James knew this intuitively, but did not fully theorise what others would later fully articulate. Sterling Stuckey puts forth a radical argument that early readings of spirituals reinforce a limited interpretation that overlooks the content and context of the spirituals which were rooted in performative, ceremonial and religious African traditions and spirituality. Stuckey states that though the ‘impact of Christianity on the enslaved is obvious and considerable... the tendency has been to treat them [spirituals] as a musical form unrelated to dance and certainly unrelated to particular configurations of dance and dance rhythm’ (28). Moreover, he stresses that when

spirituals are ‘abstracted from slave ritual performance, including burial ceremonies, they appear to be under Christian influence to a disproportionate extent’ (28). Stuckey critiques the tendencies of predominantly white collectors such as Lydia Parrish (1872–1953) and Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911). He argues that they ignored the possibility that the spirituals took on ‘an altogether new coloration when one looks at slave religion on the plantations where most slaves were found and where African religion, contrary to the accepted scholarly wisdom was practiced’ (27-30). Samuel A. Floyd argues that from their beginning spirituals had a dual function by which ‘transplanted’ Africans could retain their traditions and cultural understanding of the past whilst simultaneously ‘expressing their current struggles’ (*The Power of Black Music* 40). Floyd’s argument is similar to James’s, further supporting James’s approach to readings of the songs he heard and referred to in his recording demonstrations, as well as Cleveland Perry’s renditions of spirituals to address labour and union issues.

While James interpreted the song ‘My God Is a Rock’ as an expression of belief in city and state institutions, including judges, doctors and lawyers, I argue that the lyrics provoke contradictory interpretations. The song has a repeated scenario in which the people address these officials, who then reply that they still don’t have an answer – thus leaving the people in the same situation they were in when they first approached the officials. There is no evolution, progress or solution to their concerns. There is stagnation. I believe that this song captures the tin ear, disengagement and misconduct of these institutions since Emancipation, through Jim Crow, and arguably to this day. Historically, Black people in the US were not protected by these public officials who were actively engaged in preventing the care, treatment and support which was needed. The introduction of the poll tax, I argue, should be seen as a blunt comment on the disenfranchisement of Black people.

James's special focus on 'selling cries' demands further attention and contextualisation and should be read alongside the history of Black-owned businesses which provided self-sufficiency and independence and facilitated resistance to the existing system. In her comprehensive study of the history of Black business in the US, Juliet E. K. Walker states that Black-owned businesses were in existence as far back as 1600. Africans in North America, whether enslaved or free, 'seized every opportunity to develop enterprises and participate as businesspeople in the commercial life of a developing new nation' (Walker xiii). Even when opportunities were limited and attempts to run successful businesses were systematically suppressed by threats and legislation, these enterprises were conceived as an important means of self-support, source of self-respect, and as a path towards independence from white rule. Historically, the emphasis and sense of urgency African Americans placed on entrepreneurship and business ownership are evident in the work and texts of many activists and intellectuals. Booker T. Washington (1881), who founded the Tuskegee Institute and National Negro Business League (1901), is one example.<sup>86</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois' written work and scholarship also emphasised education as a route to economic self-reliance. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois writes: 'To be a poor man is hard but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardship', stressing the intersecting forms of oppression that Black people were facing since emancipation (9). To overcome the affects and effects of slavery and oppression and the ongoing constraints of racism, segregation and inequality, argues Du Bois, what is required is 'Work, culture, liberty – all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each' (5). For Du Bois, education was a step towards

---

<sup>86</sup> The first meeting of what became the National Negro Business League took place in Boston, MA, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1900. This meeting was open to both men and women engaged in any form of business nation-wide. Following the meeting Booker T. Washington noted how surprised he was about the level of responses and attendance, which included representatives from two-thirds of the States in the Union, with a majority from the South: 'Many of them had been in slavery during a large portion of their lives and had started in a most humble way, and in most cases in poverty and had struggled up through the greatest disadvantages to the point where they could be classed in the world of commerce' (Washington, *An Autobiography*, 311).



progress and enfranchisement, and most importantly it was a way out of white society's system of keeping Black people as the servant class, illiterate, held back and dependent (9-10). African Americans' understanding of and navigation within the economic framework of the US included constituting independent spaces for themselves and creatively applying their powers as consumers and employees to expose and oppose segregation. These methods of resistance include what Du Bois named the 'The General Strike'<sup>87</sup> during the Civil War, the 'Don't Buy Where You Can't Work Campaign' in the 1930s, and the organised bus boycotts of the 1940s through to the 1960s.

As part of this same tradition, James noted that special attention should be given to what he named the 'selling cry' which belongs to 'street cries', not merely because it was the 'most familiar, most often heard cry' but because it was the most 'self-respecting of all cries' (21). Selling cries were also a form of work song: 'weaving, shoe shining, cooking, and other examples of common work activities that might have been engaged in by solo individuals were also frequently accompanied by singing' (Burnim & Maultsby 44-5). Other scholars refer to these cries in their work but give them minimal attention and only simplified, technical or practical descriptions.<sup>88</sup> For example, Epstein and Sands write that the 'street cry' 'was improvised by street vendors in southern cities' and was 'highly functional, serving the purpose of describing what the vendor was selling in terms calculated to attract or entice buyers' (Burnim & Maltsubi 45). Floyd provides a more personal depiction of selling cries which is closer to James's. In his introduction to *The Power of Black Music*, Floyd describes it as a privilege to witness this kind of music-making and creativity:

---

<sup>87</sup> In the chapter 'The General Strike' in *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois shifted the discourse around the end of the Civil War and emancipation and centred the narrative on calculated action by the enslaved. He wrote 'How the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by a general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force (55).

<sup>88</sup> These depictions can be found as early as 1809 with 'The Cries of New York' that commented on chimney sweeps and Black street vendors selling buttermilk and baked pears. An 1850 publication about city cries in Philadelphia described the cries of a crab-man, ice-cream man, hot-corn woman, etc. (See Southern & Wright 144-45).

I remember most poignantly Mr. B., a blind seller of boiled and “parched” peanuts who peddled his wares by singing street cries and blues as he walked the streets of my neighbourhood in Lakeland, Florida, in the 1940s and very early 1950s. (3)

Yet none of these descriptions offers the type of reading that James suggested at that time, which was one that empowered the crier. Despite the fact that James related to these cries as ‘personal expression’ that belongs to their makers, they also have social and collective bearings: ‘No matter how humble the crier is, even if he possesses only a basket of frowsy collard greens, he represents what all businessmen aspire to be – a man who fashions and operates his own business’ (James *Stars* 21). In *Afro-American Music*, James provided further context to the [selling cry](#), unpacking its sonic uniqueness and its message of pride and independency. He designated them as plain cry: ‘I mean to say that the song of the cry, is almost entirely undecorated, and that the notes and the words coincide’ (‘Plain Cry: Coalman’s Cry, Fishmonger’s Cry’). The first selling cry that James presented and sang was one he heard routinely on his street in Atlanta by a man who sold his coal with great pride:

I got coal, jelly coal coal x2  
If you want to make your biscuits higher  
put my jelly coal on your fire.  
I got jelly coal coal x2

This coal comes from way down in the ground,  
And ain’t you glad you got a man like me bringin’ it around  
I got coal, jelly coal coal x2 (*Afro-American Music*).

This coal man’s cry is sung in micro tones. James noted that there is an emphasis between words and their sonic expression at the end of each phrase. This emphasis, he claims, is common to African American music and African music: ‘it is perhaps this bond which brings African music and Afro American music closest together’ (*Afro-American Music*). The second cry is of a fishmonger named Jeramiah who James knew in Jacksonville, Florida, most likely during his childhood. Analysing this cry, James also lingered on the fishmonger’s dialect and

the creative formulation of the language, aspects which were appreciated by James and Hurston alike and explored in their writings. For example, the fishmonger uses the super-plural for his wares – ‘shrimpses’, ‘crabses’, ‘fishes’, and for the people – ‘Y’all’ses’ (*Afro-American Music*). James noted that the similarity between the two cries lay in the sense of pride expressed in both: the two vendors, located in different cities and selling different products, opened their songs with the words ‘I got’. That ‘shows a certain pride and similarity’, he concluded (*Afro-American Music*).

### **The Need for Preservation and the Limits of Preservation**

To overcome these historical predicaments of erasure (of certain songs and cultural expressions) and marginalisation (of James’s work) we must pay attention to James’s practice of refusal. Tina Campt writes in ‘Black Visuality’ that in refusal there is an ‘urgency of thinking the time, space, and fundamental vocabulary of what constitutes politics, activism, and theory’ (2). A practice of refusal, in this case, rejects the premises and hierarchies of the field of collecting that facilitated racial exclusion, marginalisation and erasure of the work of key actors like James. Such refusal requires a re-evaluation of the field that questions the persistent divisions between centre and margin and the primacy of collected items over practices of transmission. This work is necessary to avoid a counterintuitive method of identifying hegemony and unravelling ‘hidden figures’. While the processes of structural marginalisation and overarching hegemony should certainly be identified, these frameworks and terminologies risk reproducing the status quo and the language of power, thereby further marginalising African Americans. Rejecting such frameworks and concepts enables a study of James’s work on the terms that he himself defined, to reconstruct his contribution and the practices that he developed, in turn recognising the rich and remarkable life he had while operating within his community in plain sight.

James's practice of refusal calls for unusual strategies and methodologies. It is important to highlight James's multiple positions and to study his work through the various influences and contributions that extended beyond the canon of folklorists and its historiography. These influences can be found in other fields of scholarship that rely on the wide networks of HBCUs, Black composers, arrangers, performers, and publishing houses.<sup>89</sup> The various participants in these networks were inspired by and in return nourished African American folk traditions.<sup>90</sup> James's collection includes correspondence with figures outside of the music scene who were likely attentive and committed to folk and oral traditions, such as the poet-playwright Langston Hughes, English and linguistics scholar Lorenzo Dow Turner, and English scholar Sterling Brown who included two work songs from James's collection in *The Negro Caravan* (1941) and wrote a piece about him entitled 'Song Hunter' which was published posthumously in 2007 (261-71). While James has been overlooked in his field, the participants in these networks also were similarly neglected in their respective fields on the basis of racism and gender discrimination.<sup>91</sup> Another strategy of refusal is to frame all modes of transmission – such as those occurring in the classroom or an orchestra's performance during a football match – as central to Black folk music, rather than ascribing value only to distinct collections. James had

---

<sup>89</sup> Another example of James's contribution to the history and development of HBCUs can be found in a letter sent to him seventeen years after he left Leland by the Dean of the Chapel, H. Beecher Hicks. Hicks writes: 'I can assure you that you are still very much alive on our campus because of the contribution you made while here'. Hicks also notified James that they would make a cut of the music James wrote and composed for Leland's Alma Mater. (Cureau 50).

<sup>90</sup> For example, several of Florence B. Price's compositions (1887–1953) included African American and African elements, from the use of spirituals like 'Wade in the Water' to Juba drumming. The Creole British composer and musician Samuel Coleridge Taylor (1875–1912) composed various works including 'African Romances', 'African Suite' and 'Twenty-Four Negro Melodies'. William Grant Still (1895–1978) composed more than 150 pieces, eight operas and five symphonies, his most celebrated being 'Symphony No.1 Afro American' and 'Symphony No. 2 Saga of a New Race', both from the early 1930s.

<sup>91</sup> For example, composer and pianist Florence B. Price, for example, addressed the obstacles she faced in the process of receiving recognition in a white man's world (and profession). She wrote to the conductor Serge Koussevitzky: 'To begin with I have two handicaps - those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins' (Ross 'The Rediscovery of Florence Price'). In his 1960 essay 'Jazz and White Music', Amiri Baraka addresses the disparity between Black performance and white scholarship in jazz: 'Most jazz critics have been white Americans, but most important jazz musicians have not been'. Though he writes specifically about Jazz, this recurring pattern can be found in other forms of Black music because it mirrors the cultural history of US society' (Baraka *Black Music* 118).

some students who established professional music careers, including the opera singers Mattiwilda Dobbs and Alpha Brawner and the composer-educator-pastor Lena Johnson McLin. A refusal of marginalisation must weigh in the number of students, choir singers and musicians who studied with James during his four-decade career, some of whom became educators themselves.<sup>92</sup> For example, Dobbs explained that although she had toured throughout Europe and studied ‘with great European talent’, she regarded Spelman as her ‘foundation’: ‘We had excellent teachers at Spelman. It was during the time we had Kemper Harreld and Willis Laurence James, and they were simply some of the best teachers I ever had to train us in music theory’ (Dobbs, ‘Operatic Sensation’). Cureau traced some of James’s former students who all attested to James’s contribution to their personal or professional development (270).<sup>93</sup> Cureau argues that perhaps James’s greatest legacy ‘resides in the collective memories of those whose lives were touched by his, who were inspired by his commitment and sense of urgency to preserve Negro folksongs, and who sang and perhaps remember his “incomparably beautiful songs”’ (20).

This chapter has scrutinised James’s life and work in its connections to themes and sites which allow us to consider folk music and song alongside notions of community, self-fashioning and pride. Following Camp, the chapter has foregrounded certain concepts, terminologies, values and – most importantly – a range of emotions. My study of James is centred on his advocacy of love, lineage, intimacy and creativity, and the way he tethered these emotions to local and community-based work while at the same time using them to highlight the cross-country and even diasporic efforts of people of colour within and outside of the US.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> James’s student at Leland College, Albert E. Carter, who served as accompanist and assisted James in his teaching, became an English teacher and the first choral director of Baton Rouge’s first Black public high school, where he taught for forty years (Cureau 49, 52).

<sup>93</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on James’s relationship with his students, including their opinions on his personality, see Cureau (270).

<sup>94</sup> James was a member of the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) and contributed to several of their events both in the US and in Africa. In 1964 he performed a lecture-demonstration on African American music in Lagos, Nigeria, for the opening of AMSAC’s West African Cultural Center, and he was part of the United States

bell hooks suggests that we think of such processes as a form of resistance, in which ‘the exploited, the oppressed work to expose the false reality – to reclaim and recover ourselves’ and in the process making ‘revolutionary history, telling the past as we have learned it mouth to mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our hearts and in our words’ (hooks *Talking Back* 3).

Thanks to the individuals who challenged James in his attempts to record and archive their folk song, and in collaboration with them, James re-evaluated the premise of preservation in a way that differentiated him from white contemporaries who collected African American folk music. James did not treat the songs as artifacts or singular, independent products separated from their environments and communities. James’s engagement with the people and communities who crafted these songs was inseparable from his collecting practice. Songs and music, in other words, were windows to the places and living experiences of the specific individuals and communities who sang them. Therefore, in studying James’s collection we must stay attuned to the personal stories he collected and attentive to how people retained their agency and voiced their concerns or excitement, and how people communicated details of their lives. James’s writing testifies to his care and attentiveness, as well as his ability to listen and learn from his encounters with the people he met. As a collector, he avoided inhabiting a position of absolute authority. When the people James wished to document challenged him or refused to participate – such as Snake, and the longshoreman who refused to say his name – James acknowledged the situation (or at the very least kept notes of their interaction), thus acknowledging the importance of the collaborative element of collecting.

The title of this chapter quotes a comment made to James by James Craig, the youngest trainer in Fairfield, Alabama. Craig explained: ‘I composed a heap of songs, but I kind of loss track of ‘em after a while. When we get tired of one we jes let it go’ (James *Stars* 43-4). His

---

music committee for First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal (Dec. 17, 1965 – Jan. 6, 1966) alongside Donald Shirley, Nora Holt, Leontyne Price Harry Belafonte, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and others.

comment encapsulates the organic process of evolution in the genre of folk music and folklore which opposes preservation and slips from the grasp of preservationist efforts originating in a colonial and imperial context of expansion, conquest and genocide. In my view, Craig's statement shows that folk traditions are not supposed to be inscribed and preserved; they are transmitted and changed across the generations. They are supposed to evolve, be adapted, and made new. James said that Ma Rainey 'composed blues every time she sang' but he also noted that 'she also lost them on each occasion, for her remarkable improvisations were never recorded' (60). In sum, folk songs will always have multiple variations that are shaped by different geographies, the performers' characters, and the social, cultural, economic setting and context of the performers' work, as in the case of Cleveland Perry, the coalman and the fishmonger. The variations of folk songs reflect the emotions and feelings of the performer and therefore often vary in tempo, rhythm and melody. Most importantly, folk songs can also be forgotten. We should, in the words of James Craig, 'jes let it go'.

## Chapter IV: The Work Family – Collecting as an Act of Repair, Collecting as an Inheritance

*‘Of this particular characteristic, we are most proud, and the more we study these songs, and the more we learn of them, the more highly we respect and the more dearly we love our forefathers in whose hearts these songs were born, and of whose souls they are an expression.’ (Work II, ‘Mrs Bradford’, 1)*

*‘[...]in each of your communities there is an abundance of significant folklore of which you have been generally unaware but which can easily be discovered usually and made available for the community’s appreciation and education.’ (Work III, ‘Folklore Program’)*

At the heart of this chapter is an interrogation of what constitutes ‘collecting’ African American folk music. The interrogation rejects the conventions that situate Black collectors (and performers) at the margins of this history and practice and is committed to tracing different collecting modalities through the examples set by the Work family, who were active in the field between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Collecting as a pursuit was first and foremost an act of care one carries for oneself and for one's community. This characterisation is evident in the collecting practice of three generations of the Work family. Collecting emerged and was formulated in ways that resemble how Toni Morrison defiantly and comfortably defined herself as a ‘Black writer’ writing *about* Black people *for* Black people, and eschewing the white critic sitting on her shoulder. The Work family’s various modalities of collecting were inseparable from, or maybe synonymous with, folk music traditions that were passed through generations by word of mouth. They were ingrained, transmitted and preserved through performance. This chapter will show that collecting was both a personal and a communal endeavour that emerged from within all-Black (often intimate) settings in the home, places of worship, and other social and educational establishments. It situated Black people at the centre of the pursuit as active participants/performers/collectors and audiences.

Collecting and performing as framed in this way were methods for the reclamation *of*, and insistence *on*, having and passing-on an inheritance; they were undertaken to allow



people to reconnect with past generations and redress the gaps in knowledge of ancestral traditions that were disrupted, crushed and stolen with transatlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery. They were acts of resistance to what Orlando Patterson defined as ‘social death’ which was ‘natal alienation’ (5). He writes that natal alienation was achieved through the denial of all rights and ‘all claims on, and obligation to, [the enslaved] parents and living blood relation[s]’ as well as on ‘more remote ancestors... [and] descendants’ (5). Randall Robinson has argued comparably and with great poetic force in his work on debt and reparation that slavery ‘with its sadistic patience, asphyxiated memory, and smothered cultures, has hulled empty a whole race of people with inter-generational efficiency. Every artifact of the victims' past cultures, every custom, every ritual, every god, every language, every trace element of a people’s whole hereditary identity, wrenched from them and ground into a sharp choking dust’ (216). This chapter argues that the Work family resisted the effects of these enforced conditions making claims on their lineage, by collecting and most importantly through performing and sharing. Collecting was an act of repair.

Building on Saidiya Hartman’s terms, in this chapter the Work family’s collecting activities are framed as both a speculative project and a critical fabulation. Collecting was speculative in its enduring motivation to imagine Black lives thriving in the face of adversity, disenfranchisement and loss.<sup>95</sup> The collecting can also be regarded as critical fabulation since these collectors relied upon the fragments of narrative and storytelling traditions which they documented and contributed to.<sup>96</sup> These fragments and storytelling traditions challenged and were written against the grand archival omissions enacted against Black people during

---

<sup>95</sup> In ‘Under the Blacklight’, Hartman refers to the structures of anti-Blackness which originated in the transatlantic slave trade and are painfully apparent today.

<sup>96</sup> Hartman describe critical fabulation as an effort to ‘paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible’ (‘Venus in Two Acts’ 11). She defines it as a double gesture of working ‘against the limits of the archive’ and ‘enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration’. This practice is done by ‘playing and rearranging the basic elements of the story’, by ‘re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view’ and by imagining ‘what might have happened or what might have been said or might have been done’ (11).

slavery, as Patterson argues. As collectors they undertook both practices with love, devotion and care.

Collecting, sharing and performing folk traditions were also central to the process of self-fashioning, as they were to notions of pride and independence. They were methods for organising the community and institution building. Therefore, this chapter turns upside down the role and *institution of the collector*: it situates and reclaims collecting as an intergenerational practice, a communal activity, and a pedagogical tool. If collecting is associated with organising and building anew, it is immanently tied to notions of progress, regeneration, renewal and change – concepts which are not often used in the scholarship on folk songs collecting.

This lineage starts with John W. Work (1848 - 1923). He was the progenitor of a tradition that consisted of manifesting and practising the right to self-fashioning and independence through the performance of song and music. Various members of the Work family followed this tradition, and this chapter focuses mainly on John W. Work II (1872-1925) and John W. Work III (1901-1967), as both have left substantial written and non-written records. Simultaneously, and in alignment with the claim that collecting was a significant phenomenon found within various African American communities and milieux in the period in which Work II and Work III were practising, this chapter will provide a (partial) mapping of key individuals and networks to demonstrate the extent of this activity. Geographically, this mapping will span from Nashville, where the Work family lived and worked, to other parts of the South and to New York City. It will focus on the Work family's affiliation with local churches, Fisk University and The Fisk Jubilee Singers.

These collectors' practices (and their imaginings of what collecting was and could be) were complex and brave even if they contained contradictions and seemed conservative at

times, so studying the practices demands grace and consideration of the many pressures and other factors to which the collectors had to respond.<sup>97</sup> The study of the collecting methods practised by the Work family outside of the narrow and mostly white field of collecting, and within the different disciplines and areas in which they were active, goes beyond the rejection of the conventions of the field that situated these collectors at the margins. It also serves to show how central their practice was, how far-reaching their contribution, and how they were never forgotten or overlooked within the circles and networks of Black composers, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), and Black-authored historiography in which they participated.

For these reasons, this chapter engages with the archival materials and existing scholarship to reassemble these elements of the collectors' practice in order to reconnect past and future generations and traditions, manifest resistance to rupture and criticism by the existing white historiography, and reclaim Black individuals and communities as makers and advocates of African American folk music. The chapter adopts a chronological order whereby each part focuses on a different generation, but inevitably there is some back-and-forth as the chapter is also committed to tracing the intergenerational relations.

## **John W. Work**

### **They Have Everything**

John W. Work was born as John Gray in Kentucky in 1848 with the status of an enslaved person.<sup>98</sup> Work, his sister and his mother Julia Ann Gray (d.1868) were sold to the Work

---

<sup>97</sup> Paul Gilroy's writing on the multifaceted personality of Martin Delany in *The Black Atlantic* provided a model for the examination of the lives and contributions of Work II and Work III. Gilroy insists on Delany's complexity and embraces what some might see as contradictory positions on politics, national identity and configuration of Blackness, opening more possibilities than other paradigms, whether conservative or radical, with their inherent limits (19-29).

<sup>98</sup> This date and location are based on reports by Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff who relied on the 1900 U.S. Census (23). Conflicting information found in William Garcia's doctoral dissertation on John W. Work III indicates that John W. Work was born in Virginia in 1830 (24).

family in Nashville where he was given or adopted the name John Wesley Work (Abbott & Seroff 23-4). As an enslaved person Work spent several years in New Orleans where he learned to read and write and became fluent in French (Abbott & Seroff 22-23). We know little about his life as an enslaved person, except that music was a crucial source of pleasure and, as I contend, it soon became a central vehicle for organising a community. While living in New Orleans, Work frequented rehearsals at the French Opera House, where his love for opera and music grew. From this experience of being in ‘close contact with theatrical life’, Work ‘learned much of Harmony [and] developed a beautiful voice’ as noted in an unsigned article in *The Crisis* in 1926 (32). Work returned to Nashville with the person who enslaved him before the outbreak of the war, and in 1870 and married Samuella Boyd (d.1918). Both were active members of Nelson G. Merry’s First Colored Baptist Church which became the first African American church in Nashville and indeed the whole of Tennessee when the court approved their petition for independence following Emancipation.<sup>99</sup> Work taught Sunday school and, more importantly, with newly independent status (personal and institutional) he founded and directed a church choir. This fact is pivotal for several reasons. First, Work built a platform to experiment with and develop his love for music together with members of his community. Songs and singing that earlier were taking place among community members in a spontaneous manner were brought by Work into a new realm – a realm shaped by his vision and direction where he wrote and arranged the music and songs for the choir. Second, Work put collaborative performative practice at the centre of both his leisure and religious activities. Work’s musical pursuits made an impact on the church choir members, which I will discuss shortly, and formed the inheritance he bequeathed to his sons and grandsons.

---

<sup>99</sup> Nelson G. Merry (1824-1884) was the first African American to lead the mission of the First Colored Baptist Church (est.1835). This church service belonged to and was managed first by the First Baptist Church that served and was run by white enslavers before gaining a more autonomous leadership in 1948, still under tight supervision. In 1865 the Black congregation petitioned for independence and when the approval was granted it became the first African American church in Nashville and the State of Tennessee. The Church’s name was changed to Spruce Street Baptist Church after its new location.

The singers Maggie Porter, Georgia Gordon and Minnie Tate Hall, who were in the original group of Fisk Jubilee Singers, were members of the church choir organised by Work at the First Colored Baptist Church. By leaning into this ostensibly small detail, a new scholarly space is opened up which enables us to challenge the conventional historiography of the famous choir. It allows us to shift the focus of the dominant narrative often described as akin to a ‘fairy tale’ to a different space and timeline.<sup>100</sup> In particular, this departure from the dominant narrative is most acutely obvious in its contrasts with the established history which starts with and revolves around white patronage and consigns the contribution of African Americans to a secondary position. With this shift of focus, this section revisits certain materials related to the Fisk Jubilee Singers, some with direct connections to the Work family and some not, to establish a pattern of reclamation of time and space, and of ownership and contributions by African American members. This approach will be extended to other groups and individuals profiled throughout the chapter and is essential to the overarching commitment to reframe the collecting practice of the Work family.

The history of the Fisk Jubilee Singers is often celebrated as an incredible success story. In his article from 1970 on the troupe, Robert C. Tipton opens: ‘There were 40,000 listeners in Boston’s Coliseum that day in 1872 when a small group of Negro singers, almost lonely among the thousands of other performers, took up the last verse of the “Battle Hymn of Republic”’ (42). While the reportage of this massive audience who ‘rose to their feet, electrified, cheering’ conveys a sense of the huge impact and success of the performance, the singers and their lives were often kept at the margin. Narratives of their story have centred mostly on the group’s leader and founder, Fisk treasurer and music instructor George L. White (1838-1895). Tipton writes that White, in his mission to solve the college’s financial difficulties, turned to ‘the only instrument that cost nothing – the student’s own *untutored*

---

<sup>100</sup> In the preface to his monograph on the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Toni P. Anderson defines the story of this famous group as something that can be read ‘almost like a fairy tale’ (xi).

voices' (43) [emphasis added]. In a more recent comprehensive study of the choir's history published in 2010, Anderson writes that 'the ensemble was the musical creation of George Leonard White, the white treasurer and choral director of Fisk University, established at the close of the Civil War by the American Missionary Association (AMA) for freedmen's education' (xi).

The task of reintegrating into this narrative both Work and the church he founded and directed serves to challenge prevailing assumptions such as Tipton's remark on singers' 'untutored voices', and other patronising beliefs about enslaved people and freedmen and women as having been lacking or dispossessed prior to white leadership and tutelage. We should pause for a moment and consider the implications of the phrase 'untutored'. For example, Kathy Lowinger contextualises the birth of the choir by stating that 'these were people who had absolutely nothing. They started from nothing after the war' (Lowinger). Garcia described how 'the resolution of the slavery problem created another one: the assimilation of the ex-slave into American culture,' and Similar to what Lowinger argued he defined the freedmen and women as 'generally illiterate and unskilled' (5). Literacy was a structural problem as the enslaved were often denied such access it is a grave historical error to argue that they were unskilled. While the formerly enslaved often got by with few material possessions and were excluded from the social and political sphere dominated by whites wielding both terror and legislation, they were never fully dispossessed. These assumptions and narratives not only diminish or erase the skills and characters of these formerly enslaved individuals and what they had built for themselves during slavery. Designating the enslaved and the emancipated as dispossessed also renders them passive within a larger narrative that is mobilised only by white actors.

The co-authored works of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten deal with matters ranging from abolitionist thought and institutional critique (the plantation, the university, the

scholar/artist) to fugitive frameworks and resistance. Their approach is useful to the task of rethinking and looking freshly at entrenched structures and dominant narratives that speak and serve the power of such institutions. They argue for thinking about what lay behind the urge of the enslaved to organise: because they ‘shared the advantage of knowing they were enslaved’. This lens makes it possible to think anew about various modes of organising prior to and after emancipation (Harney & Moten ‘The University’ 9). Harney and Moten write that the enslaved practised an ‘anti- and ante-administrative ministry of defense and profane enjoyment’ and they did so ‘amongst themselves, under duress that is beyond calculation and description’ (9). Were music appreciation and music-making, during and after slavery, Work’s defence measures and modes of profane enjoyment?

Similarly in their co-authored book *The Undercommon*, Harney and Moten consider the translation of ‘*chez lui*’ and make a distinction between the interpretation of this as something that indicates the possibility of having a home or the material condition of homeownership, and its mistranslation as ‘*among his own*’ that signifies ‘the relationality that displaces the already displaced impossibility of home’ (96). Harney and Moten see the position or state of dispossession of the enslaved when ‘among [their] own’ as point of strength and refusal to be disposed. They write:

Can this being together in homelessness, this interplay of the refusal of what has been refused, this undercommon appositionality, be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an-asked question? Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossessions, to be among the ones who cannot own, the one who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything. (96)

Work and the three choir members (all formerly enslaved) who later joined the Fisk Jubilee Singers, had ‘everything’ even when they had nothing in the way of material possessions

when they organized, congregated, when they were among their own.<sup>101</sup> This stands in contrast to the narrative Lowinger and others have set forth to fit the fairy-tale contours of white patronage.

Furthermore, beyond the three singers who were part of Work's choir, other members of the troupe in its various line-ups had acquired education in music among other things before joining the Jubilee Singers, either during slavery or after. For example, Ella Sheppard Moore (1851-1914), a formerly enslaved young woman, was a trained pianist and became the first African American woman to actively collect songs so as to expand the Fisk Jubilee Singers' repertoire. She was appointed as a music instructor at Fisk in 1868 and became the first Black member of staff there (Moon 2). Fredrick J. Loudin (1840-1904) was courted and hired by White in 1875 on the strength of Loudin's professional experience and demonstrable talent.

### **Against the Institution of the Artist – Reclaiming the Collective Space**

Moten and Harney invite us to think critically about what they define as the 'institution of the artist' (or the scholar) which effectively negates shared practice and in the case of White and the Fisk administration served to justify exploitative racial and labour relations as well as distract us from that reality. What they refer to as the politics of individuation (individual role and identity) was entrenched within the racial matrix and it was fully embodied by White and reinforced further by scholars and the press (Moten & Harney 'The University'). For example, White was described as 'a fine singer himself' who had acquired 'the musical taste' necessary to 'mold the rich natural voices of the young Negroes into an orchestral whole of incredible delicacy and power' (Tipton 43). The control that White exercised on the lives of

---

<sup>101</sup> Handwritten note by one of the members of The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers articulated the collective position in following line when they referred to the spirituals they sang as 'genuine jewels we brought from our bondage' (Abbott & Seroff *To Do This* 22).



The Fisk Jubilee Singers was inseparable from the structures of HBCUs. As many scholars have shown, the reconstructionist and abolitionist agenda that was behind the foundation of Fisk and embedded in the ideology of many in its administration and faculty was steeped in notions of white supremacy and paternalistic attitudes toward the formerly enslaved and Black people in general. As Leonar Foster notes, the white faculty at HBCU were characterised historically by their ‘paternalistic, controlling, pacifying, and opportunistic’ stance toward their students (621). White referred to the members of the Fisk Jubilee Singers as ‘children’, infantilising them and diminishing the part they played in this successful enterprise. Building on Eugene D. Genovese’s argument on the role of paternalism in plantation slavery society (3-7), it can be argued similarly that during the Reconstruction era paternalism provided the degree of proximity needed for control while simultaneously demarcating the differences between white and Black people. This proximity and the paternalistic attitudes often entailed a degree of obsession with Black people’s culture, especially music. White, for example, liked to attend ‘religious services held by Blacks and grew fond of and interested in their songs’ (Garcia 8). Did White’s engrossment in Black cultural expression and music lead him to visit Merry’s church where Work’s choir was practising? Is that what sparked his plan to organise a choir? It has been noted that the students sang the spirituals in private or, as Tipton emphasises, ‘far from any white man’s ear’ (44). He notes that students were ‘coaxed’ by White and others to sing the spirituals in front of Fisk’s white faculty (44). The potency of the institution of the artist as embodied by White is evident in Tipton’s interpretation of this invasive act of coercion. He writes that White and the rest of the faculty had merely persuaded the singers ‘to appreciate their beauties and sing them in public’ which in consequence legitimised their action (44).

Arna Bontemps’ semi-fictional account of the Fisk Jubilee Singers titled *Chariot in the Sky* (1951) alluded to the illusion of freedom provided to the emancipated within the

structures of Fisk and the choir. This was encapsulated in a dialogue between Caleb, a formerly enslaved young man, and Professor Adam Spence. The former said ‘I thought I was free, Professor Spence’, to which the professor replies ‘not entirely and not for long. We all give up a part of our freedom when we give ourselves to a thing we believe in. From now on you belong to the Jubilee Singers, Caleb – and to Fisk University’ (Graham 1). Building on Arna Bontemps’ work, Sandra Graham argued in 2006 that within the context of the abolitionist ideology and religious convictions of the American Missionary Association and white patrons who founded Fisk and presided over it well into the twentieth-century, the Jubilee Singers were not entirely free and indeed were exploited (1). Highlighting a painful irony, she observes that ‘all but one of the singers sacrificed the very goal that had brought them to Fisk in the first place: a college degree’ (2). She argues that the exploitation took the form of ‘taking advantage of another for one’s own benefit’ and was endemic to ‘situations characterized by a gross imbalance of power’ which were evident in the case of the Fisk Jubilee singers (21). Graham explains this in the following manner:

In one sense, the birth of the jubilee concert tradition can be viewed as the exploitation of a black cultural practice by whites, and the Jubilee Singers' contracts can be viewed by extension as the white exploitation of black lives. After all, the sounds coming from the students' lips, their manner of dress, their personal and professional conduct all were controlled by white male northerners for institutional gain. (21)

Having reintegrated Work’s church choir into this history and scrutinised the role of the artist (embodied by White) as inseparable from mechanisms of white supremacy and exploitation, this section reintegrates collective practices as central to the story, by gathering up evidence of expressions and declarations of participation and ownership in collecting. Departing from Graham, I propose to pursue this line of inquiry with a letter written by Work III (Work’s grandson). In this letter to fellow composer Austin C. Lovelace in 1966, Work III shifted the focus away from white actors by arguing that individuals in the African American

community, frequently preachers, created the spirituals that were later sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. He described the process of exchange and decision making within the community in the following way:

If the song was liked, it caught on and was transmitted orally from community to community. Or if it had not appealed to the congregation it died. It was just that simple. No one owned these songs and at first they were neither printed or copyrighted. (Letter to Austin Lovelace 2)

Work III's description spotlights the communal settings and capacity of collective decision making regarding the making and preservation of the songs. It assumes the sovereignty of a process that does not conform to an individualistic status of authorship or ownership. Work III's argument resonates well with Moten's and Harney's call to abolish the institution of the artist, as discussed earlier. As Graham shows, the African American singers themselves resisted notions of status such as embodied by White and they reclaimed the centrality of their shared practice. To illustrate this point, Graham quotes a letter from a member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers during one of their tours, written to a friend after a dispute with White: 'Mr. White says we are ungrateful for all that he has done for us, but I tell you, sir, that what has been done was done by us, and he cannot take it all to himself' (9). Such statements, declared in private correspondence, might have had little impact on the turn of important events at the time. However, as they are gathered now and granted greater visibility, it is my contention that this evidence should be read as part of a discourse of resistance and reclamation of power and ownership by the Black singers and their community. This discourse and process of reclamation continued in the following years.

Both Work II and Work III contended that it was the Fisk Jubilee Singers who 'presented to the world, for the first time, the concert programs on which the spirituals appeared' (Work III 'The Cultural Contribution' 2).<sup>102</sup> By treating the actual performance of

---

<sup>102</sup> In *Folk Songs of the American Negro* Work II wrote 'Fisk first gave them [the Spirituals] to the world, through the band of Jubilee Singers' (93).

these songs as indispensable to the process of introducing African American spirituals to the wider public, Work II and III challenged the historiography of the field of African American folk song. This historiography was dominated by articles, books and anthologies collected and published by white authors, such as *Slave Songs of the United States* which was the first anthology of African American folk songs.<sup>103</sup> When Allen, Ware and McKim Garrison published *Slave Songs*, they treated the ‘folk’, or in this case the formerly enslaved from whom they had collected songs, as providers of goods to be consumed by the dominant white class. ‘Slave songs’, as the eponymous publication demonstrates, were turned into a genre, style or type of music; the performers’ identities and their lived experience were beside the point. By insisting on the performative aspects of songs, Work II and III undermined the status of these anthologies published in the second half of the nineteenth-century and renders them as insufficient, partial and questionable. They reclaimed the role of African Americans as creators and performers not as subjects of research or objects of curiosity.

Their approach resonate with W. E. B. Du Bois’ claim about the impact of the renowned Jubilee choir. In *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), Du Bois mentions nineteenth-century white collectors such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Lucy McKim Garrison who ‘hastened to tell of these songs’ and ‘urged upon the world their rare beauty’ (178). But then he adds – ‘the world listened only half credulously until the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang the slave songs so deeply into the world’s heart that it can never wholly forget them again’ (178). As both Du Bois, Work II and Work III show, performance and transmission precede and transcend the act of the white collector who sought to collect them. Several scholars have theorised on African diasporic modalities of performance and transmission as part of the tradition of resistance. Daphne A. Brooks often speaks about performative agency. In *Bodies*

---

<sup>103</sup> Tim Brooks notes that ‘Go Down Moses’ was printed in 1861 and ‘Roll Jordan, Roll’ in 1862 (280). *Slave Songs of the United States* was published in 1867. Thomas Higginson wrote an article about the music in *Atlantic Monthly* in the same year.

*in Dissent* she focuses on Black performers active in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who, she argues, ‘developed risky, innovative paths of resistance in performance’ (4). They ‘drew from the conditions of social, political, and cultural alterity to resist, complicate, and undo narrow racial, gender, sexual and categories in American and British cultures’ (3). In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy argues that the history of Black music making ‘requires a different register of analytic concepts’ to make sense of ‘musical performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensified ways and sometime socially reproduced by means of neglected modes of signifying practice like mimesis, gesture, kinesis, and costume’ (78). The performative agency which Brooks highlights and the nuanced register of the performance realm which Gilroy describes were both missing from these anthologies, which is what makes Work II’s and Work III’s stance on The Fisk Jubilee Singers’ performance so potent.

There were tensions around issues of representations in Work III's writing on the Fisk Jubilee Singers. On the one hand, he too defined White as the 'genius of the organization' and notes that White was 'keenly sensitive to the strange beauty of the slave songs sung to him by the students, all of whom were ex-slaves' ('The Cultural Contributions' 2). Nevertheless, Work III was equally aware that White was excessively controlling and that his preferences and demands made of the group were informed by his notion of whiteness. This notion of whiteness is reflected in White’s prescriptive ideas about the appropriateness of performance in light of the perceptions and expectations of the intended white audience. Work III notes for example how White’s strict academic principles governed the direction of the harmonisation and that the dialect was ‘almost totally omitted’ from the members’ singing ('The Cultural Contribution' 2).

At first, the group sang what Tipton defined as ‘white man’s music’ such as operas, choral compositions and only a few spirituals that were popular with audiences (43). In 1926,

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) wrote that the popularity of spirituals sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers testifies more to the sentiments of racial superiority held by the white anti-slavery movement and less to their appreciation of the artistic or cultural value of these songs. He claimed that ‘the chief effect of this slave music upon its white hearers then was that they were touched and moved with the deepest sympathy for the “Poor Negro”’ (17-18). Johnson shed light on the structural nature of the relationship that the white abolitionist movement established with the formerly enslaved, which left very little space for the agency of the emancipated individuals to assert their right to self-fashioning.

Contrastingly, in 2000, Tim Brooks wrote that White’s choice of ‘art’ repertoire was ‘designed to show how much these former slaves had benefited from higher education’ (280). In *The Color Sonic Line* (2016), Jennifer Lynn Stoever complicates these tensions of interpretation further when she reads into the group’s performance at Henry Ward Beecher's weekly prayer meeting at Brooklyn's Plymouth Church in December 1871. Before the concert began Beecher had requested that the Fisk Jubilee Singers commence their performance behind the curtains. Stoever claims that this gesture was simultaneously concealing and revealing. By concealing the singers’ identities, Beecher was ‘delaying [the white congregation’s] conditioned sensory impressions of the group and extending the chances to win the audience heart and money’ (132). In Stoever’s analysis, Beecher’s action also ‘turned the church curtain into a screen upon which he projected a version of black identity dependent upon sound as mediating force’ (132). Beecher introduced the group by ‘constructing, authenticating, and anchoring their “Blackness” firmly in the sounds of slavery’ instead of their ‘ostensible free bodies’ (132). This incident shows how Beecher, like White, denied the singers’ freedom and the right to self-fashioning. It makes one wonder how Work and the members of the choir he directed had sought to self-fashion themselves in that autonomous space of the church where they were practising and performing.

## **John W. Work II**

### **Changing Patterns and Establishing Care**

The Work family's involvement with the Fisk Jubilee Singers started informally with Work and was continued formally by Work II, who directed the choir between 1899 and 1916, and then by Work III between 1946 and 1957. Work III noted that there was always a commitment to folk expression, reflected in the activities of the Fisk Jubilee Singers which involved collecting, harmonising and interpreting the spirituals. However, a significant change occurred once the permanent group was disbanded. Its direction, as Work III noted in an undated essay titled 'The Cultural Contributions of Negroes in Tennessee', had moved from 'the hand of the white northerner' to the '*care*' of the students and alumni who 'were fully aware of *their* artistic worth, and historical and sociological significance' (3) [emphasis added]. Work III's narration of this critical shift provides the basis for my argument about the communal and collective aspects of music making and performing of the African American spirituals and about Black people's insistence on exercising their right to self-fashioning.

Work II majored in history and Latin and graduated in 1895. He became an instructor of Latin and Greek before becoming the chair of the department in 1906. He was among the first alumni to assume leadership of the Fisk Jubilee Singers when he re-organised and directed a new ensemble at the age of twenty-five. Work II (who also served as the group's first tenor) introduced significant changes that reflected his worldview and contrasted with White's directorship. First, he disbanded the permanent group and organised lineups of smaller groups (mostly male quartets) that were assembled each time just before touring, for short durations. Writing on the phenomenon of the emerging popularity of African American gospel quartets at the turn of the century, Abbott and Seroff argue that 'an abiding respect for music training and education survived the transition' from the earlier spiritual quartet (23).

They further note that the ‘vigorous application of the disciplines of harmony singing at the grassroots level established a design for self-improvement, reinvigorating vernacular quartet singing’ and they defined Work II as ‘an effective agent’ of such transition (23). With the benefit of Graham’s critical examination of the contracts the Fisk Jubilee Singers were on, and her account of the harsh working and living conditions they were subjected to during their tours, we can assess Work II’s decisions and practice as liberating. First and foremost, they meant that the singers were able to pursue their studies and maintain fulsome (and healthy) lives amid their friends and families. No less significant were the two following changes: firstly, the introduction of chromaticism into the harmonisation instead of adherence to the diatonic scale, which enabled a more open approach to experimentation with musical structures; and secondly the re-introduction of dialect or, more accurately, the abolition of the practice of concealing dialect. Abbott and Seroff argue that Work II’s long participation in the quartet tradition ‘conferred a deep understanding of the joy of harmonizing that was fixed in black southern culture’ (24-5). Furthermore, they explain that Work II ‘recognized that innovations in recreational quartet singing, particularly improvisational “close chord” construction – barbershop harmony – were “in keeping” with the idea of development of the spirituals, and not a corrupting influence or a passing phenomenon’ (24-5). As to the second change – the reintegration of dialect – while many people had believed that standard English in a printed publication and public performance ‘reflected a desire to demonstrate that African Americans were educated and could speak and sing in standard English’ (Graziano 261), Work II’s insistence on dialect in the performance resisted both this assumption and the degrading association of dialect with the minstrel shows. When Work III stated that ‘*They established* the spirituals defiantly as possessed of genuine musical worth and meriting serious attention’ he was stressing the intentions behind his father’s decision-making (‘The Cultural Contribution’ 3) [emphasis added]. Highlighting this act of reclamation through his



choice of the word ‘established’ grants agency to the act of the performance and to the performers. These photographs (figs. 4.1 and 4.2) of the various iterations of the group capture these changes in attitudes as well as their autonomy and self-fashioning; the image differ greatly from the official and staged photographs of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers.



Fig. 4.1. The Fisk Jubilee Quartet of 1899-1900. Left to right: Noah Ryder, Samuel Caruthers, Albert Greenlaw, John Work II. (Abott & Seroff *To Do This* 36).

Fig. 4.2. The Fisk Jubilee Singers in the North. Standing outside the sleigh: unknown. In Sleigh, left to right: Noah Ryder, possibly Fred Work, unknown (seated foreground), Mabel Grant, John Work II, Ida Napier, Agnes Haynes Work, Senetta Hayes, unknown, unknown driver, Albert Greenlaw (standing far right). (Abott & Seroff *To Do This* 37).

Work II’s actions and worldview, like those of other Black faculty and students, were not regarded highly by the white administration during the presidency of Fayette A.

Mckenzie (1915-1925) and by head of the music department Jennie A. Robinson. Mckenzie ‘had decided to rein in Work’s influence at the university’ and while Work continued his

teaching he was ‘stripped of his position as head of the history and Latin departments’ (Abbott & Seroff *To Do This* 95). In 1916, Robinson who was described by Abbott and Seroff as ‘a white woman with passion for classic music and Negro Education’ (*To Do This* 21) fired Work II from his role as leader of the official university group (Brooks *Lost Sounds* 2004). Mackenzie was responsible for an oppressive rule enacted through restrictions, surveillance and fear and serving to maintain the white segregationist southern worldview. In his 1974 article ‘The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925’, Lester C. Lamon detailed Mackenzie’s presidency, demonstrating how he had embedded southern segregationist policies into Fisk activities. These included ‘arrangements for white reserved seats at the performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and for taking the girls’ glee club through alleys and kitchen doors in order to sing before white men’s clubs’ (232). He suppressed the student paper *Fisk Herald*, put restrictions on the student council, forbade the students from forming any student-run associations, disbanded the baseball and track teams, surveilled and censored students’ orations and debates and dictated the dress code around campus. Lamon sums up Mackenzie’s presidency as an autocratic rule that sought to take away ‘means of self-expression, created second class citizens, and relied upon fear [...]’ (233).

These oppressive attitudes and measures were met with resistance and action on the part of students, faculty and members of the community, culminating in a two-month strike and the resignation of Mackenzie in April 1925. Lamon has situated their resistance within a process that began at the turn of the century, intensified in the 1910s during the presidency of George A. Gates, and reached a peak with Mackenzie. Lamon frames the last wave within a wider phenomenon across several HBCUs that were marked by ‘a new generation of black Americans [that] emerged during this decade’ (225). HBCUs, he argued, ‘served as incubators of discontent’ whereby students ‘sought recognition of their status as men and

women instead of accepting increased white paternalism in the form of curricular and extracurricular action' (225). Not only were Mackenzie's actions and ideology antithetical to Work II's worldview, they were detrimental to his activities on and off the campus. Work II resigned and took on the presidency of Roger Williams University, another HBCU in town. His name came up when Fisk alumni petitioned the board of trustees to appoint a Black president, but their efforts were in vain and another white president was selected. Work II's health deteriorated quickly and he passed away within two years of his resignation.<sup>104</sup>

### **Paving the Way for Collecting as Collaborative and Pedagogical Practice**

John W. Work and Samuella Boyd Work had ten children, six of whom lived to adulthood. According to Garcia, Work instilled in his children the love for music. Jennie Daniel Work Bellentyne (1866-1944) learned pipe organ and 'she assisted him in the notation of his composition and the accompaniment of the church choir' (25). John Wesley Work II (1872-1925) and Frederick Jerome Work (1879-1942) both composed songs and are known as the first Black collectors of folk music in the United States. Work II's wife, Agnes Hayes Work (1867-1927), was a fine singer and she performed as a soloist with Fisk Jubilee Singers during her husband's tenure as conductor and replaced him in that role when he passed away. Four of their seven children pursued music in their professional lives. Work III became a collector, composer and educator and will be profiled in a separate section. Helen was a Minister of Music at the First Baptist Church in Capitol Hill, Julian was a composer and arranger in New York City and Frances studied music at Fisk and became a vocal coach in Nashville public schools.

As part of their involvement with the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Work II and his brother Frederick collected songs in various regions of the South so as to expand the choir's

---

<sup>104</sup> See a detailed account of these unfortunate events that led to Work II's resignation from Fisk in Abbott and Seroff *To Do This*, 95-113.

repertoire and develop a preservation project through celebrating and performing ancestral tradition.

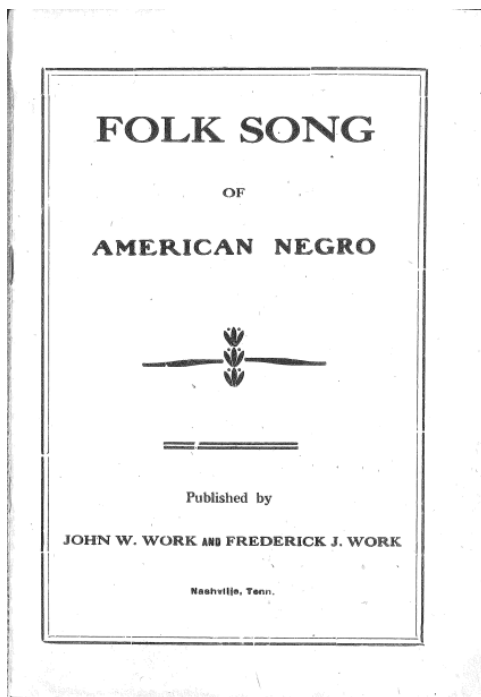


Fig. 4.3. Image (via screenshot) of the cover of *Folk Song of American Negro* Published by the Work brothers in 1907. (Hathi Trust Digital Library).

In 1901 Frederick J. Work published *New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers* consisting of forty-seven songs and they published together *Folk Songs of the American Negro* in 1907 with ninety-seven songs (fig. 4.3). The latter was revised and republished in several editions under the same title which is also the title of a 1915 study.<sup>105</sup> The songs were harmonised by Frederick. The Work brothers founded their own music publishing house called Work Brothers and Hart where these collections were published. Work II later published a decade-long study of African American folk music, *Folk Song of the American Negro*, in 1915. The Fisk University Jubilee Quartet made several records with the

---

<sup>105</sup> The first edition was not numbered. The following were numbered: Number One, Number One Revised, and Number Two. They are available as PDFs here <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/fisk-jubilee-singers>

companies Victor (fig. 4.4), Edison, Richmond and Columbia in the 1910s.<sup>106</sup> These extensive activities and publishing records surpass the work of other collectors at that time.



Fig. 4.4. Victor catalogue announcing the first Fisk Jubilee Singers releases in 1910. (Mainspring Press)

At the turn of the century, there were just a few publications dedicated to African American folk music other than the anthologies of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century. Such publications gained more prominence in the 1920s and even more so in the 1930s and '40s. Among these few early twentieth-century publications are *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies* by Black English composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1910) and Henry E. Krehbiel's *Afro-American Folk Songs* (1914). Krehbiel's interests and dominant paradigm can be discerned from the publication's subtitle: *A Study in Racial and National Music*.

<sup>106</sup> In 1997 Document Records issued the three-volume series *Fisk Jubilee Singers: In Chronological Order* which included some recordings by Work II as well as recordings made in the two following decades. Three years later in 2010, in even more extensive restoration project, these recordings by Work II were issued by Archeophone on a double-CD set titled 'There Breathes a Hope: The Legacy of John Work II and His Fisk Jubilee Quartet 1909-1916.' This set included a 1993 interview Doug Seroff conducted with Reverend Jerome I. Wright who was introduced as the last surviving member of the Jubilee Singers who had sung under the direction of Work II. The liner notes were written by Tim Brooks. For more details on early Work II's recording journey and quartet training, see Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 192-215; Abbott and Seroff, *To Do This*, 11-113.

Krehbiel, a German-American music critic based in New York, was interested in a scientific study of African American musical idioms, using comparative analysis to explore its distinctiveness from other folk music melodies (x-vi). Krehbiel sought to determine what should be regarded as folk songs and what constitutes national identity ('are they American?') and to resolve the dispute over the originality of the music and its relationship – embedded in slavery – with its 'savage ancestors' (ix). Already in 1903, in his theorisation of the 'sorrow song', Du Bois had claimed that the 'negro folk songs' and the 'rhythmic cry of the slave' were not only the 'most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas' but were the 'sole American music' (*The Souls* 178). Seven years before Krehbiel pondered on these questions of the identity and originality of the African American folk songs, the Work brothers' self-published *Folk Songs of the American Negro* (Number One) announced boldly on its back cover that these songs were 'America's only original music' (fig. 4.5).

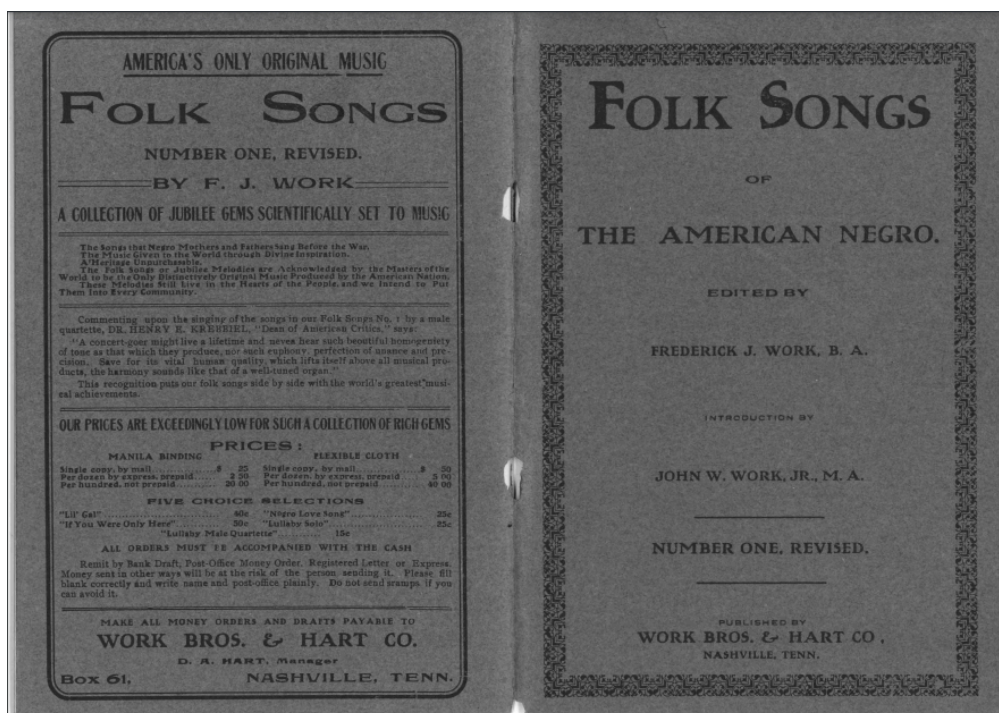


Fig. 4.5. The cover of *Folk Songs of the American Negro* (Number One, Revised). Published also in 1907. (Hathi Trust Digital Library).

In his 1915 book, Work II expressed his appreciation of Krehbiel's work and noted that Krehbiel's 'deep and comprehensive knowledge of the subject' rendered him as 'an authority' (Work II *Folk Song* 32). Krehbiel's authoritative status was useful to Work II's efforts to dispute arguments against the originality of African American folk music and was also deployed to help entrench the principle that national identity was inseparable from the fight for equal citizenship. Work II wrote that 'facts bear out the statement of Dr. Krehbiel that the songs of the slaves are practically the only American product of this kind which meet the scientific definition of Folk Songs' (32). However, for all Work II's praise, I would argue that Krehbiel's aims and methods differed significantly from the Work brothers' mission to centre their work on the people, their stories and songs so as to redress gaps in knowledge of ancestral traditions. In contrast, Krehbiel's practice and studies were conceived and executed via an analytical, necessarily othering lens that did not fully consider the people and their voice. The Work brothers collected and constructed fragments of narratives in order to apply what Hartman describes as speculative methods – imagining 'what might have happened or might have said or might have done' (Hartman 'Venus' 11).

The Work brothers' entry into the field of collecting was thus a personal and communal endeavour and inseparable from their lives and inherited traditions. At the same time, it was unprecedented; they were entering a field that was white-only. An editorial in the *Fisk University News* from 1923 commented that 'it was fitting that these songs should have been collected and edited by a member of the race which produced them, and this work Professor Work has done' (Garcia 38). By carving out this space, Work II paved the pathway for his African American contemporaries as well as for future generations. For example, the Black Canadian-American composer R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943). Dett, who was a generation younger than Work II and became known for his folk songs and arrangements of spirituals, argued that *Folk Song of the American Negro* positioned Work II 'as one of the few



real authorities on Negro folk music' (438). It seems likely that Work II's innovative practice of collecting, composing, publishing and performing at Fisk opened up the way for Dett's similar practice at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and the two collections of folk songs that Dett published later: *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute* (1927) and *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals* (1936). Abbott and Seroff notes that Work II's efforts at Fisk 'bound the national initiative to advance black music education to the movement to preserve and develop spiritual singing as a living American art form' (*To Do This* 24).

Writing in 1980, music scholar Samuel A. Floyd further stressed Work II's influence when he defined *Folk Song of the American Negro* as 'the earliest published affirmation, by a black scholar, of the cultural importance and legitimacy of Afro-American music' (Floyd 'Dedication' 1). He added that it was a 'virtual celebration of blackness, a condensed but epochal history of Afro-American folksong' (2). Floyd went beyond admiration for Work II's excellent prose and incisive analysis to argue that the publication represented an 'informed and thoughtful approach to black music research', establishing Work II as a pioneer and progenitor of Black music scholarship as an empowering practice. Contrastingly, in 2005, Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov defined the Work brothers' collection as an attempt to provide 'worthy representation of the race to white society' (1). Building on Floyd's acknowledgements and on Work II's own words, I argue that it is only to the white collector's/scholar's gaze that it would seem as though Work II was aiming to appeal to white society. Floyd, Dett, and critics in local and national Black newspapers all perceived the collection as an empowering work which generated new possibilities. Recognition of this characteristic of Work II's practice is provided by the African American journalist and music scholar Cleveland Allen who wrote in 1925 that Work II made Fisk into 'the leading center in America for the study, collecting and preservation of Negro Spirituals' (109). He added



that he and his brother Frederick together 'have done more to make known the beauty of Negro music than any other persons in America and are regarded as the recognized authorities on this music' (109).

In his book, Work II criticised white people's collecting practices as inseparable from the context of slavery and structural racism and pointed out their problematic motivations. For example he made the association between the lament that the 'old plantation melodies are dying out' and the Southern white man 'who was part of the system of slavery [...]' (92). To them, these songs, Work II argued, manifested links to 'a romantic past' when 'the black mamies' reared 'ten generations of masters' (93). Work II argued that these early collectors conceived these songs as 'curiosity in the world of song [...] entertaining but transient' because the world 'never considered it more than a commodity [...]' (90). He pointed out the damage that resulted from these approaches toward Black music and culture as entertainment and its effect on African Americans post emancipation when 'the Negro refused to sing his own music in public, especially in the schools... This is due to the fact that these students have the idea (which is often correct) that white people are looking for amusement in their singing' (*Folk Song* 114). At the same time, he noted the role HBCUs played in his era and the different motives and model of preservation they offered:

Now, at Fisk, Hampton, Tuskegee and Calhoun earnest and serious efforts are being put forth to collect, sing, study, and develop it. This work on the part of the centers of learning insures a permanency which this music most certainly deserved. (90)

As such, I suggest we construe his collection, his writings, his care, as resistance to the status quo, acting to destabilise the kinds of discourse, concepts and truths conceived and shared by white collectors. Work II's intervention as a scholar of Black folk music was premised on the reclamation and declaration of lineage and inheritance, as he passionately stated in the preface to his book: 'the work was undertaken for the love of our fathers' song. It has brought me much real pleasure and now it sent forth in love'(6). At the same time, he saw the

study and preservation of these songs as both a source of inspiration and a reminder of the atrocities of slavery – ‘lest we forget’ (93).

### **Makers of the Songs – Building an Anti-Racist Archive of Story, Song and Image**

Work II’s *Folk Song of the American Negro* had a two-fold mission. The first was to reject existing scholarship: ‘so much of what has been written on the subject of the “Folk Song of the American Negro” has been positively inaccurate and unreliable’ (6). The second was to centre Work II’s research on Black people’s experiences and perspectives: ‘I deemed it proper to learn the story from the songs themselves and the makers of the songs’ (6). Unlike the 1867 anthology and Kehbiel’s study, this was a crucial dimension of Work II’s contribution, through which he constructed an archive of a sort. In chapter five which he titled ‘A Painted Picture of A Soul’, Work II appealed to readers to let him lead them ‘into the presence of a soul’ (122). He explained that a person will ‘generally express what he thinks if he is not to be charged with it afterwards’ (122). This appeal, I believe, hints at his unique position as a Black collector as compared with the white collectors of the late nineteenth-century onwards. In his monograph, Work II explained his methods in the following ways:

In making the investigation extending over a decade, all available publications were consulted, all possible byways and highways were searched, as many ex-slaves as possible were conferred with, and every available person who knew anything was questioned. From these sources there have been gathered about five hundred songs and fragments of songs. These have all been analyzed and their thoughts and sentiments gathered. These are the colors in which the soul is painted. (123-4)

This archive thus consisted of music, thoughts and sentiments but also images and stories centred around African American people. The archive was Work II’s attempt to examine the past but was also built in contemplation of what he would leave behind for the next generation. Notwithstanding that Work II was certainly putting his foot in the door and

making an entrance into this all-white field, I argue that this publication was aimed at an African American readership. Towards the end of his book, Work II said clearly ‘We know for a fact that it was never intended that the world should understand the slave music. It was a kind of secret pass-word into their lives’ (123), a statement which reveals the intimate relationship between the music makers and its intended audience. Work II’s emphasis on intergenerational relationships, together with the book being a Fisk University publication, points to him wanting these materials to be put to use by African American composers, students and the various choirs he organised and directed.

Moreover, in his foreword, Work II explained how he approached his task of tracing the makers of the songs to glean the information that was so lacking from previous accounts:

This has sometime meant hunting in out-of-the-way places, attendance upon church services here, there, and yonder, in season out of season. It has meant in some cases, years of search for some special information, sometimes following the trail from state to state. Sincere efforts have been made to verify the statement and propositions herein, and though some of these statements seem almost incredible, I beg the reader to understand that very much of the history and description has come to me first hand from those who have been a part of them. (6)

Work II’s regard of the African American men and women he met as ‘reliable’ sources was itself a corrective to a longstanding practice that had insisted that people of African descent were not capable of independent thinking, an assumption which was common among pro-slavery supporters and white abolitionists alike.<sup>107</sup>

Work II’s commitment to the centrality of the musicians and the carriers of the tradition was the first of its kind and was crucial to the model that Work III used and expanded on with even greater generosity and detail. This commitment was noticeable within

---

<sup>107</sup> In Nathaniel S. Shaler’s famous racist column ‘The Negro Problem’, published in *The Atlantic* in 1884, the formerly enslaved were described as ‘children lost in a wood, needing the old protection of the stronger mastering hand’. Eugene Genovese demonstrates in *Roll Jordan Roll* (1974) that paternalistic attitudes were essential to the institution of slavery. As Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse argued in *Growing Up Jim Crow* (2006), these attitudes were further adapted to justify the structural inequalities and standards of social behaviour of the Jim Crow Era.

the many vignettes and anecdotes that Work II included in his book about the origins of certain songs – stories which reveal the close-knit relationship between songs and storytelling traditions. These stories were like a window into the world of the enslaved. They were also like windows on the ways the next generation became the storytellers of these stories and how they altered or emphasised certain aspects. The book also contains photographic and textual documentation of specific individuals of significance to Fisk and the city of Nashville, to acknowledge their contribution in a richer way. A portrait of Sarah Hannah Sheppard (fig. 4.6) is captioned ‘in whose heart was born “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Before I’d be a Slave, I’d be Buried in My Grave”’ (79).



Fig. 4.6. Portrait of Sarah Hannah Sheppard from John W. Work II's *Folk Song of the American Negro* (70).

Not much is known about these photographs – who took them, when and where. The oval frame in Hannah Sheppard's portrait echoes W.E.B Du Bois' experimentation and reclamation of the racist eugenics format advanced by Francis Galton (figs. 4.7 and 4.8). Du Bois' use of the format extends the claim for citizenship and equality performed through (mostly, but not only) middle and upper-class representations (Smith *Photography and the Color Line* 52). Shawn Michelle Smith reads Du Bois' use of photography from the turn of the century as a key component in the construction of an 'anti-racist visual archive' because it challenged scientific evidence and rejected prevailing derogatory representations (Smith 'Looking at One's Self' 581).



Fig. 4.7. (Left) African American woman, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly right, part of Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Du Bois' albums of photographs of African Americans in Georgia were exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900.

Fig. 4.8. (Right) African American woman, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly right, part of Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Du Bois' albums of photographs of African Americans in Georgia were exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900.

Du Bois' photographic archive consisted of men and women, young and old. He noted that these volumes of photographs 'hardly square with conventional American ideas' ('The American Negro at Paris' 577). Du Bois' approach resonates within the celebratory power of Hannah Sheppard's portrait. It is manifested through her half-smile, her direct gaze and the slight tilt of her head, elements which combine to reflect a sense of confidence and pride. Hannah Sheppard was a formerly enslaved woman who nearly took her own life and that of her infant daughter to resist the gratuitous violence of slavery.<sup>108</sup>

To interpret this portrait, it is useful to turn to the scholarship of Fred Moten around slavery.<sup>109</sup> Moten challenges scholars of slavery to avoid becoming immersed in the terror for

<sup>108</sup> According to several biographical accounts written by Work II in 1915 and by Andrew Ward in 2009, the woman who was the enslaver of Sarah Hannah Sheppard took pleasure in terrorising her by various means including forcing her daughter Ella to spy on her, threatening to separate them, and rejecting Ella's father's (who held the status of a free man) proposal to manumise her. In this state of terror Sarah Hannah Sheppard sought to end her life and that of her daughter on several occasions and was stopped by a fellow enslaved woman. At the end, Ella's father was able to manumise Ella but not her mother. (Ward 4-6; Work II 78-82).

<sup>109</sup> On cries especially, see Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition*.

the sake of conveying how terrible it was: ‘anybody who thinks they can understand how terrible the terror has been without understanding how beautiful the beauty has been against the grain of that terror is wrong’ (Moten ‘The Black Outdoors’). That beauty, he suggests, lies in the moments of resistance: ‘there is no calculus of the terror that can make a proper calculation without reference to that which resisted, that just not possible’ (Moten ‘The Black Outdoors’). According to Work II, an enslaver from Tennessee ‘had sold a mother from her baby, the day for the separation was fast approaching when the mother was to be taken “down South”’ (*Folk Song* 80). ‘Down South’ was to the enslaved a ‘journey from which no traveler returned’ (80). Moten’s words have resonance with the portrait of Sarah Hannah Sheppard which was taken when she had reached old age, having lived through the terror and been reunited with her daughter after years apart. The words also resonate well with the notions of pride and self-fashioning manifested and encouraged by Work II in his writing. With Work II’s caring treatment, this portrait of Sheppard celebrates her resistance which became her legacy, encapsulated in song:

Before I’d be a slave,  
I’d be buried in my grave,  
And a-don’t let it catch you with your work undone. (70)

The portrait of Ella Sheppard Moore (fig. 4.9), Sheppard’s daughter, was taken in a completely different manner. The frame is horizontal and broader. Sheppard Moore is positioned at the centre of the frame, but the image suggests an effort to capture as much as possible of her surroundings. The piano in her portrait symbolizes more than luxury and class status. The piano often served representations of middle-class white women in the nineteenth-century, providing ‘a gauge of a woman’s training in the required accomplishment of genteel society’ (Burgan 51). For Sheppard, one might assume that the piano was both a symbol of independence and authority and a vehicle for self-expression and education.



Fig. 4.9. Portrait of Ella Sheppard Moore from John W. Work II's *Folk Song of the American Negro* (81).

However, I suggest that we see this portrait as one that stands in contrast to the material and social conditions which had shaped Sheppard Moore's traumatic upbringing, her musical development in the face of discrimination, and her years touring with the Fisk Jubilee Singers that were marked by perilous conditions, exploitation and poor health. While this portrait is obviously staged, Sheppard Moore projects a sense of ease and confidence as she is seated in what we can assume to be her home, alongside her piano on which she rests her hand comfortably. Without directing her eyes to the camera, her gaze is seen and she seems to have the hint of a smile. The decoration of this room, with beautiful wallpaper and furniture and the cluttered ornamentation on the piano, suggests that the life she built for herself was rich (not in its material sense), away from the days of Fisk Jubilee Singers tours during which she was often depicted as 'frail and sickly' (Ward 24).

Looking over several of the Fisk Jubilee Singers group portraits (figs. 4.10-4.12), the similarities are striking at first – Sheppard is situated at the same spot, in the middle of the frame, seated in a similar position by the piano with her hand resting on the piano, and she is facing in the same direction. The orchestrated nature of the group photograph, in which all members are heavily dressed and some seem uncomfortable in their positions, echoes our knowledge of what was behind the scene. Beyond the fact that in the photograph the singers'

refined clothes contribute to an illusion of wealth or belonging to middle or upper classes, the group portrait evokes a sense of the extent of control exercised by White and others on the group. One can detect the intensity of effort involved in their crafting of an image of the choir – a choir which they wanted to project the ultimate balance between an authentic Blackness that was imagined and sought by White (achieved through the songs’ imagery and emotional execution) and a refined and restrained atmosphere achieved also by the harmonisation and re-arrangement of the songs. In her own portrait Sheppard Moore appears at the centre of her own narrative, one which she orchestrated in her home.







Fig. 4.10. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, n.d.

Fig. 4.11. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, n.d.

Fig. 4.12. The Story of the Jubilee Singers, Ella Sheppard Moore, 1851-1914, Fisk Jubilee Singers, unidentified photographer, 1875. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Hannah Sheppard told Work II the story behind ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’:

We simply wanted a new song to sing in church, and we just started singing this song. Our troubles weighed us down, and, of course, we were thinking of them more than anything else. It came to me this way, “Um! Most done toiling here,” and I sang it; another sister added something else, and it kept on until we had a “new song”. (*Folk Song* 82)

These stories of Sheppard Moore and her mother, together with other anecdotes about how certain songs, stanzas or verses came about (as told to Work II by his students at Fisk or by the Fisk Jubilee Singers), reveal a cross-generational movement. Work II called these stories extraordinary and they were also a testament to the collaborative nature of folk song making and collecting. Work II asserted several times throughout his book that the making of a song is a collective process and only in such manner can a song reach its correct level of complexity and depth:

‘it is not likely that this shout sprang complete from the soul of any single creator [...] this is unthinkable, for it is too comprehensive, too full of meaning, too purposeful and too finished to be of extemporaneous birth’. (84)

An undated speech written by Work II reveals how he sought to articulate collective determination in his praxis as the director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The core message he heard in his collecting of Black folk songs and wanted to convey in his study was not the inescapable depth of sorrow which was often associated with the spirituals and which Johnson argued fitted well with the white abolitionists' image of Black people. Out of the hundreds of songs Work II and his brother Frederick heard and studied, 'there has not been found, nor can there be found any hint of bitterness, hatred or revenge' (Work II 'Mrs. Bradford' 1). The songs they heard gave expression to 'hope, joy, faith and love' and were based upon 'the holy writ' (1). Work II valued these characteristics and found them striking and noteworthy. His interpretation of these songs does not stand in contrast with Fredrick Douglass who interpreted the spirituals as symbols of suffering and despair. Pain, loss and despair are present in the lyrics of the songs that Work II collected, ranging from the more familiar 'I'm Troubled In Mind' and 'Feel Like A Motherless Child' to the less familiar such as 'Keep Me From Sinking Down' and 'Before This Time Another Year'. Douglass wrote that the spirituals convey 'the soul-crushing death-dealing character of slavery' (*My Bondage* 76). The difference, however, lies in the encounter they had both experienced but seventy years apart. Douglass wrote his interpretation upon '*hearing*' those songs: 'they were tones, loud, long and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish' (76) [emphasis added]. He described them as features of his 'plantation experience' in which he was both a participant and observer as an enslaved child and a young man (76).<sup>110</sup> This illustrates how the sonic experience was shaped by the conditions and context for the hearing. Work II, who collected from the end of the nineteenth-century, was one generation removed from slavery. He collected among the formerly enslaved and their children, and he had a different encounter with such music. Work II was aware of the time that had passed and noted

---

<sup>110</sup> Fredrick Douglass escaped in 1838 at the age of 20 years old.

that hearing these songs outside of the settings in which they originated could change their character. He wrote: ‘certain intonations and a certain inexplicable something imparted by those in whose hearts they were born, can never be reproduced otherwise or represented by musical notation’ (*Folk Song* 91). Work II’s construal of these songs seems closer to Du Bois’ dialectic definition of ‘sorrow songs’ in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois refuted the interpretation of spirituals as a testament to the joyous life of the enslaved, even though he acknowledged some of the songs express joyous feelings. These songs, Du Bois argued, were ‘the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways’ (179). Similarly, Work II wrote ‘No sorrow can be deeper; he drains the cup of suffering; he descends into the depths of the valley’ (*Folk Song* 55). Du Bois added that ‘through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things’ and that ‘the minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence’ (*The Souls* 186). Du Bois’ complex interpretation of the sorrow songs informed Work II’s approach to organising the songs in his book under these categories: Songs of Sorrow, Songs of Sorrow with Note of Joy, Songs of Faith, Songs of Hope, Songs of Love, Songs of Determination and Songs of Courage. His classification, like Du Bois’ theorisation, insisted on a nuanced emotional range to these songs. Another thread that Work II established through music collecting and that resonates well with Floyd’s assessment of his contribution is the sense of pride it brought, providing a means to connect with past generations. Work II wrote:

Of this particular characteristic, we are most proud, and the more we study these songs, and the more we learn of them, the more highly we respect and the more dearly we love our forefathers in whose hearts these songs were born, and of whose souls they are an expression. (‘Mrs. Bradford’ 1)

Collecting, dialogue and learning were essential parts of the mission to redress the many effects of slavery including family separation and trauma, and the difficulty of discussing this period.

As a collector himself and as a critic of the white-led field of collecting African American music, Work II had to battle the many voices of white collectors with their various attitudes conveying racist tropes and stereotypes and even the apparent rejection of the very notion that Black people in America have made any contribution to American music other than, rarely, where mediated through the authority of white collectors. For example, In *Folk Song of the American Negro*, Work II rejected Richard Wallaschek's thesis expressed in *Primitive Music* (1893) that African American folk music was not only overrated but it was also a 'mere imitation of European composition which the Negroes have picked up and served up again with slight variation' (60). Wallaschek's argument was used and circulated by other scholars and was challenged vehemently by generations of Black collectors and scholars such as Willis Laurence James in the 1940s. In response to Wallaschek's claim, Work II wrote that even the hymns emerging out of European compositional practice which were popular among African Americans, such as the 'Dr. Watts' form, were executed so distinctly that they were incomparable to any European musical tradition. Writing in an animated poetic style, Work II described the African American singers:

[They] can run up and down the scale, make side trips and go off on furloughs, all in time and in such perfectly dazzling ways as to bewilder the uninitiated. In truth, the uninitiated would not recognize the best known hymn sung thus, unless he could catch a familiar word every now and then. (*Folk Songs* 29-30)

As Abbott And Seroff note painfully, 'There is no monument to John Work II on the campus of Fisk University, at the Ryman Auditorium, or anywhere else in Nashville,' and that he deserves a much greater recognition (*To Do This* 111).

### **John W. Work III**

#### **‘For the Community’s Appreciation’**

Born in Tullahoma, Tennessee into an innovative musical family that had shaped the field of African American composition, performance and education since the 1870s, Work III’s collecting endeavours were integral to his development as a prolific composer and a committed educator. His writings illuminate a collecting practice that was informed by an apparent sense of historiographic urgency and commitment to telling the story of African American folk music and reclaiming the centrality of Black musicians, scholars and composers as advocates for and keepers of this tradition. These qualities situate Work III’s practice in distinct contrast to the pursuits of white collectors who preceded him and those who were his contemporaries. It is through his investment in Black education and his commitment to Black musicianship and Black-authored scholarship that Work III could highlight the importance of the right to self-fashioning and change within the Black community in the post Reconstruction and Jim Crow era.

Trained in history and music (theory and vocal) and as a music educator, Work III sought to operate within various disciplines including musicology, ethnomusicology and folklore studies.<sup>111</sup> These disciplines favoured theories, aims and methods that historically suppressed the agency and advancement of Black people when they formed the objects of research. However, as the next section shows, Work III’s commitment to facilitating progress and change, and his faithful attention to cultural expressions amid hardship and loss, challenged many of the dominant paradigms and assumptions in the disciplines he worked in.

For example, Work III argued that folk songs are (always) still in the making and play an integral role in the life of Black communities. In a paper he delivered at an event marking Fisk’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Work III addressed the audience directly by saying ‘in each of your

---

<sup>111</sup> He published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, in *Arts Quarterly*, *Papers of the Hymns Society*, *Motive*, *The Music Quarterly* among others.

communities there is an abundance of significant folklore of which you have been generally unaware but which can easily be discovered usually and made available for the *community's* appreciation and education' ('Folklore Program') [emphasis added]. Through his collecting, Work III provided substantial evidence for this view. In a letter he sent to Fisk president Thomas E. Jones in 1943, Work III explained that his studies and his approach as a collector were 'guided by the principle and belief that practically all folk expressions have specific functions and specific fields of folk-life in which they function'. In his work, Work III showed how these songs emerged from and accompanied painful and important events such as disaster and death, but also commonplace experiences such as working conditions, love, intimacy and spirituality.

Work III articulated his frameworks and methods in his 1930 master's degree thesis 'The Folk Songs of the American Negro' at the Teachers College, Columbia University. It is among the earliest master's level theses devoted to the study of African American folk music; as far as I know, it is the first by an African American scholar and probably the first that draws attention to the field's educational potential. His 1940 book *American Negro Song* (that was based partially on his master's thesis) alongside previously unpublished and published materials and correspondence (1940s-1960s) and show how his collecting practice influenced his historiographical approach to Black music.

Work III's potential for making a groundbreaking intervention in the field of folklore by shifting the focus away from the mission of 'salvage ethnography' was circumscribed by a system designed to maintain white supremacy and dominance of knowledge production.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> 'Salvage ethnography' or the 'salvage paradigm' is associated with the field of early twentieth-century anthropology led by influential figures such as Franz Boas, A.L. Kroeber and Bronislaw Malinowski who sought to record the languages and/or the lore of communities and cultures they argued were disappearing. Clifford described the 'salvage paradigm' as 'reflecting a desire to rescue something "authentic" out of destructive historical changes' arguing that it is still common in ethnographic writing, connoisseurship and collections of the art world ('The Others' 73). For a critical examination of this paradigm and its lingering legacy as well as the urgency of its undoing, read further Clifford.

His engagement with this system can be seen in his interactions with Alan Lomax. Like the other Black collectors examined in this dissertation, Work III's career was shaped by (and continued in spite of) enforced precarious conditions, limited access to recording equipment, and the exploitation of his work and labour by white collectors and various institutions. The most far-reaching example of such exploitation and marginalisation was brought to light in *Lost Delta Found* (2005) edited by Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov. This publication gathered the unpublished manuscripts written by Work III and two other Fiskites – Lewis Wade Jones and Samuel C. Adams – during a joint project of Fisk University and the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress represented by Alan Lomax from 1941 to 1942. Beyond the importance of publishing these materials sixty years after they were written and reestablishing the contribution of these three Black scholars, the editors demonstrated that the three were never considered or treated (by Lomax) as true 'interlocutors' (Dougan 144). The correspondence included in the book shows that although it was a collaborative enterprise the contribution of Work III was represented as secondary, and his valuable presence in the field was belittled as were the dozens of hours of grunt work of transcription he did for this project. The project materials which Work III had collected on fieldwork trips and transcribed and analysed, which were meant to be edited into a book, were deposited by him to the Library in the mid-1940s but there they were 'misplaced, recovered, and misplaced again', as Gordon reports (xvi). However, between the time of the original library deposit and the 2005 publication of *Lost Delta Found*, references to the materials appeared on records and publications from as early as 1943 through to Lomax's memoir in 1993, with little mention of Work III's contribution.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Lomax wrote to Work on January 2, 1947, after the project had been stagnant for months, requesting access to the materials to make duplicates from the trip to use in a 'noncommercial' publication, explaining that submitting such a request to the LoC would cost him much more. He also alluded that Fisk should be happy about that.

*Lost Delta Found* and the newly-visible platform for Work III's collection which was added to the LoC website in 2000 have served to bolster his profile.<sup>114</sup> However, it is important to reiterate that Work III was never really a forgotten figure within the African American scholarly, musical and local communities. It is only from the perspective of dominant white circles and disciplines that he appeared to have been forgotten. The events and initiatives commemorating Work III's life and work are good evidence that his influence has endured. These events and initiatives were led by the local community in Nashville and Fisk and they attest to the impact of Work III's long career and illuminate the strength of the Black networks of support established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to which Work and Work II and their contemporaries belonged. Since his death, Work III's colleagues, former students, and Fisk alumni have celebrated his rich life and expressed great care for his legacy. In 1974 the John Wesley Work III Memorial Foundation was established to sponsor the research and study of African American music and to carry his work to this day.<sup>115</sup> They argued for the posthumous transfer of Work III's collection to the Fisk archives and organised concerts in his memory which showcased his compositions and arrangements. As Simona Atkins Allen wrote on these efforts in 1967:

'It would seem that the institution to which Mr. Work has given his entire professional career should be proud to acquire and become the custodian of the John Wesley Work Collection' Such a collection would be of tremendous research value, and would also make our Alma Mater the safeguard of one of the largest reservoirs of Negro music. It is hoped that not only those of us who are Fisk music graduates, but all Fiskites would want to share in making such a collection a reality. Thus, we would communicate, perhaps in small portions,

---

<sup>114</sup> The LoC American Folklife Center contains a short biographical notice about Work III, and relevant materials are spread across two collections: *Library of Congress/Fisk University Mississippi Delta Collection* (AFC 1941/002) and *John Work Collection of Negro Folk Music from the Southeast* (AFC 1941/035) which include audio recordings, photographs and correspondence.

<sup>115</sup> The Links Inc. is an international, not-for-profit corporation for professional women of color, established in 1946. The Nashville Chapter which founded Work's memorial foundation was chartered in 1952 and included several wives of Fisk faculty such as Mrs. Alberta Bontemps and Mrs. Bess Faulkner. Their vision was of 'African American women using links of friendship to provide community service at a local, national and global level'.



our high esteem for John Wesley Work and his art (Allen 'John Wesley Work' 13).<sup>116</sup>

The impact of Work III's project extended beyond local and immediate circles; he became the focus of a doctoral dissertation submitted by William Burren Garcia to the University of Iowa in 1973.<sup>117</sup> In 1980 Samuel A. Floyd dedicated the newly founded *Black Music Research Journal* to the memory of both Work II and Work III. Floyd asserted that the thinking of both men had 'reached fruition long before black music scholarship attained its present sophistication' and that their 'assumptions and deductions remained sound' ('Dedication' 3). Moreover, Floyd identifies their consciousness and Black pride as features which influenced contemporary and future scholars, as did the emphasis by Work III and Work II on 'the importance of extolling and preserving the musical heritage of black Americans' (3). The impact 'of these two men upon generations has been quiet, but profound', as Floyd sums up (3). Floyd's scrutiny highlights the multifaceted yet often less visible forms of influence permeating Work III's legacy.

The study of Work III's overall career and the different aspects of his collecting practice and approach shows how significantly his work differed from Lomax and other white collectors active in that period. This broad context is required for understanding the importance of Work III's dual formation as a collector and a scholar of Black music which preceded the unfortunate collaboration with the LoC and Lomax, and it partially explains his persistence in carrying on this work despite the frustrating outcome of that episode.<sup>118</sup>

Confronting the exploitation and the marginalisation enforced on Work III as a Black collector within the field of collecting is important. Here I challenge the status or label

---

<sup>116</sup> Allen was a Music department graduate of the class of 1952 also directed a seminar on John W. Work III in the Annual Arts Festival at Fisk University in 1973.

<sup>117</sup> Garcia's doctoral dissertation provides an extensive exploration of Work's musical education, his compositions and arrangements.

<sup>118</sup> Work III was also let down by his institution and its president who, judging from the documents gathered in *Lost Delta Found*, favoured a collaboration with a prestigious national body such as the LoC at the expense of the recognition of Work's position and contribution.

designated to Work III with *Lost Delta Found* as an overlooked collector or musicologist who recorded Muddy Waters alongside Alan Lomax. He was not overlooked. Work III was never forgotten or neglected in the circles and networks of Black composers, HBCUs, and Black authored historiography.

### **Mixing Traditions**

At the end of his senior year in 1923, Work III presented a voice recital at Fisk Memorial Chapel as the culmination of his project in voice culture. The programme reflected his passion and commitment as a performer and arranger. Work III combined pieces from Schubert, Rossini, Lehmann and Handel with work by the famous Black British composer Samuel Coleridge Taylor including a segment from part three of his trilogy of cantatas titled ‘The Song of Hiawatha’ (ca.1898) based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem. Most importantly he interleaved into the recital two spirituals he had arranged: ‘On My Way to the Kingdom’ and ‘I Feel like My Time ain’t Long’ (Garcia 46). His programme reflects on his diverse, polyphonic, non-hierarchical musical appreciation inherited from his grandfather and father and substantiates his claim of drawing on multiple influences spanning European western, Black diasporic and local African American traditions.

Following his graduation from Fisk, Work III moved to New York with the intention of becoming a professional singer and he stayed there for four years. He studied at the Institute of Musical Art (later renamed the Julliard School), taking piano, theory, English and Italian diction courses, mythology, and singing classes with Gardner Lamson. Work III lived with his uncle Frederick in Harlem while working at the post office and as a ‘red cap’ (porter) at the Grand Central railway station.<sup>119</sup> However, his income was insufficient and he could

---

<sup>119</sup> Eric K. Washington provides a fascinating account of the African American men who worked as red caps at the Grand Central terminal in his book *Boss of the Grips: The Life of James H. Williams and the Red Caps of Grand Central Terminal*. He describes this workforce, consisting of hundreds of African American men, as an essential part of the long-distance railroad experience in the United States.

not afford his studies after the first year, but he continued to take lessons from some of the faculty on a private basis. The traumatic death of Work II in 1925 which happened just before his father was to board a train to New York to receive better treatment than was offered in Nashville, put further obstacles in the way of Work III's dream. His family stayed with him in New York until his mother Agnes was offered a job training a singing group at Fisk set up for the purpose of raising money for the university. Her untimely and traumatic death in 1927 during a performance in St. Louis forced Work III back to Nashville where he completed his mother's contract at Fisk and took full responsibility for his siblings, the youngest of whom was only ten years old. Work III worked and supported his family throughout the year, employed on precarious contracts and low salaries as a music instructor at Fisk. During the summer months he returned to New York to complete his master's degree in music education at the Teachers College, Columbia University.

Garcia quotes at length from Work III's 1931 application letter to the Rosenwald fund. In that letter, Work III expressed that his interest in musical composition was inseparable from the socio-political and cultural context of the music. He also resisted the historical characterisation of music as mere entertainment, which in the context of Black artists and performers in the United States was embedded in practices and structures of exploitation and subjugation during slavery and in racist and degrading tropes and appropriations since the mid-nineteenth-century with the rise of minstrelsy. He wrote:

I am vitally interested in musical composition – composition that has a definite sociological value as well as a musical one. I feel that music should have more valuable function than merely entertaining listeners. It should portray life, particularly those subtle aspects of life that can be expressed only through the arts. (quoted in Garcia 63)

Work III made explicit links between his worldview, his interest in music and his upbringing, making it clear that music was not mere entertainment:

My life has been from the first spent in an atmosphere of folk music, the study and presentation [preservation, sic.] of which my father a very important part as the author and collector of several volumes of Negro folk songs, in addition to leading the Fisk Jubilee singers for thirty years. Because of his lifelong association, I have a deep love and admiration for Spirituals, Work Songs, Blues, and secular – the folk music of the Negro. But while I am interested in the preservation of this music and realized that there is much more to be done in this field, I am more interested in its serious development into larger musical forms.’ (quoted in Garcia 63) [inserted phrase appear in Garcia reprinting of the manuscript].

Work III’s pedagogical methods and his own published compositions and arrangements contributed to the preservation of these songs and music. He drew inspiration from the folk songs he heard and collected throughout the American South and in Haiti. As a Fisk alumnus and during four decades of his career at Fisk, Work III participated in the shift of its leadership from white to African American.<sup>120</sup> This leadership change was epoch changing – it restored African Americans’ visions of how a historically Black college and university should operate. Charles Johnson, Fisk’s first African American president, avowed that his main goal was to encourage the students to develop the ‘terms of their own strength and identity’ (Gasman 5). Work III was twice awarded the distinguished Julius Rosenwald Foundation Fellowship. It enabled him to attend Yale where he earned another degree in music. He published about 115 compositions for which he won several more prestigious prizes.<sup>121</sup> His compositions were varied, including works for orchestra, instrumental combination, voice and chorus.

---

<sup>120</sup> Charles Johnson came to Fisk in 1928 to chair the social science department and in 1946 became the first African American president of the university. Work became the first African American chair of the Music Department in 1950 after 23 years of working in the department. He was chair until 1957 when due to health problems he asked to carry fewer responsibilities.

<sup>121</sup> He was awarded first prize in the 1946 competition of the Federation of American Composers for his cantata ‘The Singers’ and in 1947 he received an award from the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM). Since 1941 he was a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). In 1961, Work was invited to become a Charter Member of the American Folk Music Council – a joint organising committee of the American Folklore Society, the American Musicological Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology.

Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff assert that early twentieth-century African American sacred harmony singing, the style of practice that Work II promoted and Work III continued to develop, was shaped by the interaction of two historical motivations: the first was ‘to perpetuate folk music traditions’ as a ‘cornerstone of black cultural identity’ and the second was ‘to master standard Western musical and cultural conventions, the formalizing principles behind artistic harmony singing’ (14). These two motives also drew repeated criticism from both white and Black critics, exemplifying just how contested the notions of class, respectability and authenticity were in both folk and classical European musical expressions.

Alan Lomax commented on this very matter in an interview in the 1980s about his relationship with Work III. As a folklorist, his observations on Work III’s work and the tradition of choral arrangement were both dismissive and condescending. At first, he said:

The piano, the organ, the limitation of the diatonic scale, and the kind of harmonies that people knew how to write and thought were respectable were imposed on the music instead of a horizontal stream of harmony, with every man collectively improvising a part; the thing was organized more in terms of the block choral style of Europe [...] At the same time, and partly because of that, it had a huge success. It was enormously popular. Those choirs kept those Black colleges going. (Lomax ‘Interview’ 1)

While the Fisk Jubilee Singers in its many formats (including the groups led by Work II and Work III in the 1950s) had achieved great popularity and generated an extraordinary amount of money for the university, Black creators and performers of classical music had to fight to stay afloat as amid tangibly precarious settings. They had to navigate the hatred, discrimination, instability and exploitation that they regularly experienced, particularly in the era from the late nineteenth-century until the 1960s. Lomax’s enchantment with a certain kind of musical expression that he described as authentic, free and improvisational is restrictive and it disregards the rich range of musical expressions practised by African Americans by their own will and choice, as was evident in Work III’s voice recital from 1923 and in his grandfather’s love for opera. In unmistakably rude and dismissive tones, Lomax added:

Remember, these same people went to chitlin suppers and took their shoes off and could also sing and dance in African and African-American styles. But when they got up to sing and perform the songs they became more and more like divas... when I say respectable I'm saying the standards of fine art Central European music which were the only standards there were at the time. They weren't being bullied, you understand. They were running to it. (1)

Lomax was not only confining African Americans to a certain musical expression, he was imposing boundaries on their desire to take part in other musical activities, especially those pursuits that Lomax and others believed should be reserved only for white, Euro-American peoples. That is, he was purporting to deny the very cross-cultural processes that had occurred from the moment of encounter between Africans and European colonisers and were expanded under conditions of bondage and within the matrix of domination, oppression and surveillance of African musical traditions. Most of these processes of cross-cultural exchange occurred in the realm of sacred music as was the case for the 'Dr. Watts' and the Sacred Harp traditions. Both of these traditions originated in white European and Euro-American settings and were adapted and transformed so drastically that they became distinctive African American expressions, as Work II and Work III demonstrated in their writings. In this interview, Lomax undermined and belittled Work III when he said 'John had an appreciation of this ironic position that he was in. He made his living running the proper musical life of Fisk and he was very very talented'. Lomax, who at this stage of his life and career was considered by scholars to be politically astute, sought not only to perform the gatekeeping of what constitutes authentic Black folk music, of what is real and raw, but also of what constituted Blackness. In Lomax's eyes, Black people were going to 'chitlin supper' in bare feet, so it followed that when they were engaging with the central European music tradition they were masquerading.

For the Work family and many others, European and Euro American classical music traditions extended matters of taste and were rather ingrained within a collective practice and notions of self-fashioning. Lomax's disregard of these musical traditions contributed greatly

to the marginalisation of Work III and his work. Garcia notes that both Work III and his father had ‘attempted to find a central position in American civilization for the Black man and his music’ (42). The difference between them, Garcia remarks, is that Work III was also interested in secular music ‘which his father disregarded’ and therefore he succeeded in expanding the ‘scope of the musical legacy his father left’ (43). Blinded by his own misconceptions, Lomax overlooked Work III’s early interest in blues and other forms of social expression through music.

### **Educator**

Work III was a visionary educator in the way he put to practice and expanded on the relationships between HBCU and the African American folk music which his father had written about in 1915 in *Folk Song of the American Negro*. On 26 June 1940, Work III wrote to Thomas E. Jones, Fisk president, about his vision of developing a research branch of the music department that would be dedicated to the study of African American folk music. He rearticulated this ambition in another (undated) letter he sent to Jones, in which he emphasised his commitment to the Coahoma study being conducted jointly with LoC. Work III stressed that he saw the study as a Fisk project, one which would position Fisk as a major centre for the study of Black folk music and tradition. He envisaged how the materials produced would benefit the university and encourage future research by students and faculty. He wrote:

I believe that the Mississippi Folklore Project will prove to be more and more important. Unquestionably we have the most important and comprehensive Negro folk music collection in America (or in the world probably) except that in the Library of Congress. This collection coupled with our extensive library materials on the subject offers a rich source of research and study. Also we have preserved by a stroke of good fortune much valuable Negro music and speech that due to the description of the Negro rural life in the South by the war may have been lost forever. (Letter to Thomas Jones, n.d. 5)

Had such a research centre been realised, it would have formalised and therefore stabilised and consolidated what Work III was already doing in an individual capacity and often out of his own pocket. More importantly, such a centre would have altered the state of the field by encouraging students and other members of the community to become active members of the collecting community. A centre like this would have provided a strong alternative model to white collectorship and its control of the field.

Work III's legacy as an educator can be found in the work carried out by former students who pursued paths in music education, performance and composition. For example, in 1952 Work was invited by Olive Coleman T. Brown, his former student at Fisk, to be a consultant on a workshop she organised for Louisiana music teachers for school children (Letter to Olive Coleman). His former student Kenneth Brown Billups Sr. (1918-1985) became a composer, choir director and educator. Hildred Roach (b.1937) became a pioneering scholar of African American music and the author of *Black American Music: Past and Present* (1973). Roach said that she got her first job in the Tuskegee Institute with the help of Work III. She became a professor of music at the University of the District of Columbia. In an oral history research project in 1987 about Black musicians and educators, she shared her recollections of Work III:

At Fisk, John Work was one of these kinds of people who said, "now, you know, my friend, you know you want to take counterpoint." And you had no intention of taking that particular course during that particular semester so he sort of steered you in the right direction. John Work taught spirituals because he conducted the Jubilee Singers. He was also a strong father figure with the essence of a substantial being that could do no wrong. I never found out until after his death, during my research, that he was a composer of note, and that he had published so many of these spirituals in a book. [...] He was a thorough teacher and yet he stood up and gave you everything in all of those classes from memory. I remember that he would give definitions from memory. Of course he'd done it so many years, but still this impressed me. So I figured when I teach, everything I do is going to have to be from memory. (Hardin 236-7)



Work III identified the uniqueness of Fisk as an institution in the fact that it served as a cultural centre that emphasised the importance of education and created platforms and opportunities for students to participate in the arts, both music and literature. He wrote about people like Charles S. Johnson and James Weldon Johnson at Fisk and the work that they undertook during their tenure. He also emphasised the local artistic and intellectual landscape of Nashville, which included the poets Roscoe C. Jamison, Leland M. Fisher, and George M. McClellan, and the scholars invested in historical and sociological studies such as Merle R. Eppse, Lorenzo D. Turner, Miles M. Fisher, Charles Victor Roman, Lewis G. Jordan and Thomas O. Fuller. He noted the contribution of Aaron Douglass to the arts and to Fisk, praising his design of the interiors of the newly built Fisk library in 1930s. Douglass created murals depicting different periods in Black history from Africa to America, with each room presenting a different period and theme. Work III acknowledged the work of William Edmondson (1874-1951), the first African American folk art sculptor to hold a one-person show at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1937 ('Cultural Contributions' 10).

In his 1940 book, Work III provided a mapping of individuals and networks locally and nationally who were committed to folk songs. These people were academics, ministers and performers who in most cases had been absent from the existing historiography of the field. This mapping reveals the central place occupied by folk songs in so many people's lives and informs us of the different ways each individual sought to engage with the study and preservation of the songs. It contributes to the sense that the 'folk' (that is, the musicians and performers) are not separate from the field of study nor simply the subjects of study, but active actors in the work. For example, Edward Boatner (1898-1984), only a few years older than Work III, was an arranger of spirituals and a music director in all-Black institutions such as the Baptist church and an HBCU. He was exposed to the diversity and richness of local

folk musical expressions during his childhood as the son of an itinerant minister.<sup>122</sup> He started collecting at a young age and developed his music education while being mentored by and simultaneously collaborating with African American professionals such as Roland Hayes and R. Nathaniel Dett. Work III commented on Boatner's arrangements of spirituals and how they retained the call-and-response form (*American Negro Songs* 4). Work III referred to Boatner's arrangement for 'On Ma' Journey' (1928), performed by many African American artists including Paul Robeson, Ruby Elzy and Leontyne Price, as a definitive illustration of Boatner's and Work III's belief that the spiritual is a wellspring of a range of African American musical genres. In her 1947 [performance](#) of Boatner's arrangement, the contralto singer Carol Brice (1916-1984) honed these qualities in an effortless manner. Boatner shared Work III's commitment to collecting and teaching as strategies of empowerment and resistance, as articulated in Boatner's unpublished treatise 'The Damaging Results of Racism' in which he explained the aim behind the 'self-study music text-books' he was writing (Glover 91). Boatner wrote that these books were intended 'for all people who desire fundamental teaching in music, but are without necessary funds to attend music school, conservatories, or to be taught by expensive music instructors' (Glover 91). Work III also highlighted the work of Lorenzo D. Turner (1890-1972) who was his colleague at Fisk as head of the English department. Turner's pioneering linguistic research among the Gullah communities along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina and the Sea Islands undermined the mostly white-authored studies that had argued that no African language or culture had survived the middle passage and the arrival to North America. Turner also collected songs during his travels and noted the region's unique musical expressions. Other scholar noted and

---

<sup>122</sup> He served various institutions throughout the country as music director for Olivet Baptist Church, National Baptist Convention, Samuel Huston College in Austin and the Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn. At the end of the 1930s he opened the Edward Boatner Studio, where he taught and trained. See more on Boatner at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; Brooks *Lost Sounds* 470-2.

admired by Work III was the Sierra Leonean composer and music scholar Nicholas G. J. Ballanta. In this regard, both Work III's and his father's practices of citation were part of the Black diasporic project of reclamation and empowerment but also solidarity. While they had to establish their own places and authoritative voices in a predominantly white field, they were committed to demonstrating that they were not working from within a vacuum, but were part of a large network of scholars and cultural agents who were committed to such traditions.

As the first African American chair of the music department at Fisk, Work III had the opportunity to implement his values and his focus on Black musicianship by means of pedagogy – highlighting the importance of pedagogy in the context of Fisk as an HBCU. He confided his vision to a colleague:

For decades, Fisk has tried to evolve an especially unique musical philosophy but we have always been thwarted from it by imported department heads who were chiefly interested in installing here a department nearly like that of the school from which they came. As a result Fisk has always been a “little Oberlin” or “little Harvard.” I must hasten to say however, that Fisk's music department has always been a very good one – and is very good now. And it has always been held in high esteem in the musical world. Maybe the time has come for us to step out boldly and organize our music curriculum around a philosophy that is peculiarly Fisk's. (Letter to Jasper Atkins, 1)

### **Collecting What *Is*, Collecting Change**

Work III's practice was premised on an empowering message and it was part of a broader approach steeped in the predominantly Black environment in which he grew up and worked. His voice and contribution were crucial in a time when the white supremacy and systemic racism which sought to repress full citizenship and equality were often embodied in white collecting practices that reproduced and justified harmful stereotypes. These practices and stereotype cherished neglect as a by-product of their desire to preserve an imagined authentic past.

At the nineteenth annual Fisk Festival of Music and Art in 1948, Work III delivered a paper which was later published as an article in *Journal of American Folklore*. The title of this paper was ‘Changing Patterns in Negro Folk Songs’ and in it Work III presented to the audience his working thesis – that folk songs are a living thing. Some of his evidence had been collected nearby in Nashville, reaffirming his statement (quoted earlier in this chapter) that ‘[...] in each of your communities there is an abundance of significant folklore of which you have been generally unaware but which can easily be discovered usually and made available for the community’s appreciation and education’ (1). He told the story of Reverend Zema Hill (1891-1970) of the Primitive Baptist Church in Nashville and how he had stirred up a local revolution when he organised a choir in the mid-1940s, adorned the singers with robes, and added a piano. This new setting was in sharp contrast to the historical and unique African American singing tradition that was commonly practised in this church and the Southern states in general and had become known as the ‘Dr. Watts’ or the ‘long meter’.<sup>123</sup> Rev. Hill deviated overtly from this tradition in which a single leader, often the reverend himself, would be ‘lining out’ – that is, calling or singing or preaching a line from the hymns to which the congregation would repeat and or join, in a very slow, ornamental manner, stretching each word or phrase for as long as they wished. Besides, the instrument Rev. Hill added – the piano – was ‘closely identified with secular life [...] as opposed to the sacred – the church’ (‘Changing Patterns’ 138). The members of the church saw these additions to the church service as a ‘dark heresy’ (138). When Work III asked about this radical change, Rev. Hill explained that he wanted to respect the will of the younger members of the church who wished to have music during the service. By that time, phonographs and radios were furnishing more and more homes, jukeboxes were blasting new sounds at juke joints and dining establishments, and the greatest performers of the era were touring the country, playing

---

<sup>123</sup> The tradition is named after English hymn writer Dr. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) who published the first collection of hymns in 1707, and term ‘Dr. Watts’ is also used in the case of hymns not authored by Watts.

in the most remote places. In this socio-cultural context, the demands for music in church were understandable and common across the country in white and Black communities alike. Work III was attentive to this change and sought to capture its significance. He explained that the success of this new type of music was even ‘greater than Reverend Hill had anticipated’ and that the vigorous protest against the music on the part of the older church members had soon ‘died down to the merest grumble’ (138). Young people ‘entered into the singing and the church service with a spirit and enthusiasm they had never evinced before’ (138). The effect of this change cascaded around the city to other Primitive Baptist Churches which soon organised choirs and introduced ‘rhythmic piano’ into their services.

A [recording](#) from sometime between the late 1930s and early 1940s, later included on a 2008 album compilation *John Work III: Recording Black Culture*, captured the sounds of this new setting. It starts with a rhythmic piano intro; the player is tapping the keyboards vigorously before the high-note female chorus burst into singing ‘I Am His, He Is Mine’.<sup>124</sup> The tune differs greatly from the original composition and is more akin to a boogie-woogie style, and the lyrics sung by the singers are far removed from the original hymn written by a nineteenth-century Irish hymnist named George Wade Robinson.<sup>125</sup> There is both unison and variance, with individuals from the congregation adding their background voices to the chorus at certain points, alongside irresistible clapping.

This story is neither anecdotal nor minor. It illustrates Work III’s position as a collector, a position that was shaped by and can be conceptualised through his way of relating to the community and its course of renewal, regeneration and change. The story reveals the process of inter-generational negotiation that resulted in the acceptance of change and accommodation to change. Work III did not overlook or dismiss the product of this

---

<sup>124</sup> The performers of this song are credited on the album compilation simply as ‘Female Group & Zema Hill Church’.

<sup>125</sup> The hymn was written by Irish hymnist George Wade Robinson in 1890, and it is accompanied by the tune ‘Everlasting Love’ composed by English composer James Mountain at about the same time.

development as less authentic or less worthy of attention. Most importantly, Work III framed the process as a positive one, empowering even. Through it, Rev. Hill and the church he was leading managed to overcome the intergenerational distance and the growing distrust of the younger members by responding to their desires and aspirations. Work III's affirmative stance on this process differs markedly from the attitudes that typically accompanied the preservationist projects of many ethnographers, anthropologists and folklorists who were active from the nineteenth-century and into the first half of the twentieth-century and who would have mourned or scorned such processes and defined them as a *loss*. Interestingly, Work III did think that the 'Dr. Watts' was a unique tradition, writing: 'there is something epic, something elemental, something overwhelmingly religious about the rendition of these old songs. Starting softly and informally.' ('Changing Patterns' 138). Nevertheless, Work III did not adhere to the expected position of either or, which is key to the argument that his definition of the 'folk' was not monolithic, but somewhat fluid and often contradictory. For example, when Work III wrote about the instrumental accompaniments that were added to the singing in the church, he believed they were 'just as integral a part of the performance as is the singing and in a like manner equally an expression of the folk' (136).

### **Music Makers**

Work III, like his father, was paying attention to the individuals and the communities from whom he collected. His movements between the field, the classroom, the concert stage, the church and other communal venues were combined with his experience of precarity and discrimination. The fruits of these movements equipped him well and were inseparable from his commitment to care and advancement in African American education. We see this commitment already in his early documented interest in blues in his 1930 thesis, which was then integrated into his 1940 publication. Work III acknowledged two musicians named

George Gibson and Earl Woodward who provided ‘inestimable help in this study’ (*American Negro Songs* 35). He described them as musicians who were ‘thoroughly steeped in the lore of the blues and other folk dance music, and endowed with fine musical sensitiveness’ (35). Like Willis Laurence James, Work III established a fuller picture of their material and educational conditions which attest to the systemic neglect of rural African American communities in the South, while also stressing the individuals’ innovation, talent and persistence in making a living out of music. Gibson, for example, was a ‘genial young man’ who was ‘always ready to play his fiddle for anyone who ask it’ (35); he does not know to read notes but ‘he knows them all when he hears them’ and he has an ‘absolute pitch’ that helps him tune his fiddle (35). Gibson made a living from his music, and as such his income was mostly modest and precarious, as dances where he might be hired were ‘not frequent’ (35). Woodward was described as the best player in South Nashville – ‘a reputation he guards most jealously’ – yet he worked an arduous manual job as a rock-mason (35). Work III’s vivid depiction of their meeting, which he called ‘unforgettable’, resonates with his apparent excitement in writing ‘they played blues for me – blues that I had never heard before nor since’ (35). The verses he put down on paper compensate for the lack of sonic recording. On the cold winter afternoon of their meeting, Work III had sat with Gibson and Woodward in the back room of a shanty where Gibson was living. Most of the blues they played and sang, Work III noted, ‘were their own creations’ (36). He regarded their abilities so highly that he even speculated that ‘two or more were composed at the sitting, judging from the smiles of evident pleasure that enveloped their faces at the singing of certain lines’ (36). In what seems like a feast of improvisation and exchange, the two musicians started by playing three or four stanzas before one of them started to sing until he neared the end of ‘his immediate supply of verses’, and then the other man would ‘sing directly to the other one, who would take up the song’ (36). That would go on until that person was out of verses. At

this point, Work III explained that ‘he would in the same manner signal the first singer who was now ready with a new supply of verses recalled and some probably composed’ (36). This dialogue would continue ‘indefinitely’ until one of them would sing a closing verse, which featured in most of their songs:

If anybody ask you who composed this song,  
If anybody ask you who composed this song,  
Tell ‘em sweet papa Gibson (or Woodard)  
Jes gone ‘long. (36)

In his accounts of songs he had collected from the communities he visited, Work III paid special attention not only to the way the songs were being sung collectively, but also to the processes of decision making that shaped the songs and their survival. Work III emphasised how both the spirituals and work songs were typically sung in a group. And they share a similar structure that relies on one individual – the leader. Within the spiritual settings, ‘the leader is the most important factor’: it is the leader who ‘sets the pitch and tempo, and it is he who sings the verses’, thus guiding the content and the form of the piece (38). The leader, as Work III noted, ‘was not chosen haphazardly’ but he must be a ‘specialist’ (38). From the various examples he provided, it is apparent that the leader’s role, at least within the genre of the spirituals, is not necessarily limited to the same person. The leader can be interchangeable and dynamic, reflecting the community’s wishes or the song’s demands. For example, Work III noted that many churches had spirituals that had been successfully led by a specific individual from the congregation and were given the singer’s name. Thus, Work III wrote, ‘within a church a spiritual can be designated as “Brother Jones’ song,” or ‘Sister Mary’s song’” (27), the ‘ownership’ being conferred for ‘indisputable ability to sing it effectively’ (27). Reading within Work III’s explanation, I interpret this position on a song’s ownership as something that is decided by the community rather than the individual, reflecting the community’s pleasure and approval. Therefore, on reading the explanation by Work III that



when an acknowledged leader or singer of a certain song passes away, the song dies with him, I see this as another testament of the community's role and power in making decisions and extending tribute to its passing members. Preservation, or the lack of it, is at the hand of the community.

Work III's attentive care of the communities where he collected is evident in his account of his 1938 visit to Ozark in Alabama where he first heard Sacred Harp singing. Andrea Murphy describes how his notebooks from that period were filled with 'meticulously executed lead sheets (pages of musical shorthand that document the melody, harmony, and lyrics of the song), and reveal his facility as an ethnomusicologist' (12). In his article 'Plantation Meistersinger' (1941) Work III provided a generous account of his collecting trips to the various Sacred Harp conventions and shared how special these encounters were to him: 'in the northeastern corner of Alabama there flourishes an unusual activity full of significant value for all persons interested in American folk culture' (97). Echoing the animated manner of his father, Work III emphasised that these communities treated shape note singing in such a way that the style exceeded its original familiar form and attracted greater participation of its members, much like the African American treatment of the Dr. Watts. 'The momentum of fifty years of such participation has established shape-note singing as a permanent feature of the community life', he noted (97). This participation and the commitment of members to the format also contributed to the improvement of reading skills among the community (97). As Work III explained to a Fisk colleague in 1938, the course of his study included 'observation of the singing: gathering exhibits – music books, pictures, program [...]; interviews of the leaders; interviews of non-singers in the community' (Letter to Willis Duke Weatherford, 1-2). However, the lack of material support for his collecting work not only made his travels to rural locales sometimes impossible, as these communities were often far from train or bus routes, but it also meant that he did not have access to the recording equipment he desired and

needed. In his letter to Weatherford he described the resource situation as ‘woefully inadequate’, explaining that the ‘unusual method of conducting and the highly developed musical skill’ demanded ‘moving pictures and phonograph recording to present an accurate story of the activity. I sincerely feel that the project is eminently worthy of this additional equipment.’ (1-2). This reveals Work III’s clear understanding of the potentiality of the new technologies to capture the communal practice and experiences that he was interested in.<sup>126</sup> It also reveals that lack of access to these technologies meant that his work and his methodological insights were invisible to the wider community of folk music collecting.

Work III’s interest in Sacred Harp singing started in 1938 by Ruby Ballard during her visit to Fisk. Ballard was Supervisor of African American schools in Dale County, Alabama. Work III’s recollection reveals his particular interest in the wide, communal participation in this singing. Ballard told him about how:

neighbors gathered in the evenings to sing; how birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays were celebrated principally in singing. Frequently music-makers from the entire county gathered for a singing festival which might last from one to two days. Once a year singers from all the counties in the section would meet for two days. (‘Plantation Meistersinger’ 97)

Ballard notified Work III that the yearly Alabama State Sacred Harp Singing Convention would meet in Ozark for two days at the end of September in that year (1938). Ten minutes after his arrival, Work III regretted not bringing a recording machine or movie camera – ‘both were needed to present an accurate story of what I was witnessing’ (98). However, his detailed description was rich enough to let readers visualise the event in their minds:

Singers were arranged in well-defined order. Seated on the benches to the right were the sopranos, designated as the trebles. The altos sat on the rostrum and in chairs directly in front of it. The Basses set on the left with the tenors in the middle section. The singers thus surrounded an open space about twelve feet square reserved for the tuner, the leader, and the president of the convention. It

---

<sup>126</sup> Work III, much like Hurston who had used a 16mm camera since 1927, was here recognising the value of moving images to capture aspects that were difficult to describe in prose, such as body movement, rhythm and most importantly the collaborative experience. Franz Boas, who documented the Kwakiutl dance from 1888, had started using film as a method in 1930 believing that the new technology would provide ‘adequate material for making a real study’ (Farnell 48-9).

was interesting to note that men sang in both the soprano and alto sections at a pitch an octave lower, and women sang in the tenor section at the same pitch as the men although a few shrill female voices could be heard clearly an octave higher. It was striking that the larger number of the approximately five hundred singers were men – and tenors. (98)

Work III emphasised that the setting did not suggest an organised chorus, despite the arrangements by sections, gender and octaves. He noted that ‘the singers assembled as informally as they would in a church service’ (98), each singer holding a bulky copy of W. M. Cooper’s *Sacred Harp* (1902 edition). Most interestingly the leader was interchangeable: each song was led by a different person who according to Work was designated by the community. He described the process in the following manner:

The leader’s name called, he (or she) approached the clear space in the center and announced the name and number of the song he would lead. The pitch for the various parts was given by the tuner, and elderly, very authoritative man possessed of the envied faculty of absolute pitch, was sat close by. No instrument of any kind was present. The pitch given, the leader began the song, which was taken up immediately by the entire body. It was sung through first in the *fa sol la mi* syllables, then with words. (98)

The role of the leader was to set the tempo of the song, assure the correctness of the performance, and stimulate the group as whole to a state of ‘high fervor’ (99). He did so with bodily gestures and movements including beating time with his arms, swaying his body, and marching to and from the different sections. The degree of the fervour, explained Work III, was dependent on the ‘ardor and prestige of the leader’ as well as the popularity of the chosen song (99).

Work III’s depiction of this unique singing practice, with the fascinating dynamic between charismatic leaders and creative individuals among the group, makes the singing of these old hymns hardly recognisable in comparison to their white origins. As Paul Gilroy notes, there is a danger in how ‘critical (anti)aesthetic judgment’ can be made on synthetic expressive cultures and what role ‘ethnicity and authenticity’ plays within these judgments. (‘Sounds Authentic’ 114). For Gilroy, these questions and concerns apply to creolization and

adaptation of cultural expression by various diasporic populations, but they are equally relevant to the use and adaptation of various expressions by the Black population in North America. The extraordinary phenomenon captured by Work III undermines familiar critiques of shape-note singing that it is a homogeneous phenomenon which is inconsistent with authentic folk expression. Applying his musical education in both practice and theory, Work III elaborated on the qualities of the Sacred Harp singing such as the singers' tones which he argued were mostly to serve the volume and were generally 'shrill, hard, and frequently raspy and strained' but he saw 'these shortcomings' as irrelevant in light of the 'enthusiasm and skill of the singers' (100).

Work III was fascinated and perhaps inspired by the fact that these singers 'sing for their own enjoyment' and the audience role or presence in these events was rather marginal (101). However, he explained that sometimes the leader would take requests from the audience. He provided an example where the requests of white people in attendance acted to disrupt the autonomous space and alter the participation of its members. The president of the convention selected Sister Rosa Bowerick to lead 'Loving Jesus', as requested by these white visitors, and added words of warning to the singing members not to 'overdo the song' and to 'sing it jus' like it's written [...] nice and sweet' (101). The president was in effect commanding the members to adhere to a kind of respectability and restraint in their performance by following the script, rather than displaying the innovation and creativity which had marked their vocal practice until that moment.

Work III's efforts to describe this event and its impact in detail are revealing not only about the performance of Black people in front of a white audience, but also about the reliability of white collectors' scholarship on Black performance. White folklorists who were active in those days have expressed their disappointment at the performances of Black musicians and even the congregations in Black churches for not being 'authentic' enough or

for performing as whites do, by following the written hymns.<sup>127</sup> Although Work III noted that the performance was impressive for its ‘great roll of tone, the dynamic delineation of motives’ and ‘Sister Rosa’s colorful but graceful conducting’, he also observed that three women who had sung ‘lustily’ in all previous songs now ‘remained quiet’ (101). I suggest that the action taken by these three women should be considered as tantamount to a strike – a refusal to sing – through which they were resisting the intrusion of the white audience and refusing to comply with the president’s demand to perform respectability. White collectors could not have documented such an occurrence without recognising and embodying such intrusion themselves.

### **Between Folk and Tradition: a Speculative Project**

In Work III’s writings, there are tensions and contradictions about the ‘folk’, folk music, change and preservation. Addressing these conflicts demands the scholar to apply special care and a certain grace. The tensions reflect the constraints of the disciplines Work III wanted to participate in, and they are at their most visible within the concepts and methods these disciplines articulated and promoted. Some of the tensions also point to certain norms and attitudes that the African American elite had adopted to differentiate themselves from the enforced association of Blackness and folkness with backwardness and illiteracy, notions of inferiority promoted by white supremacists’ discourse on ‘The Negro Problem’ (Favor 4). W.E.B Du Bois’ idea of the ‘Talented Tenth’ and his interest in eugenics and IQ testing are representative of such tension. The idea emerged from his configurations of class and the

---

<sup>127</sup> Before he started recording shape note and Sacred Harp singing in the 1940s and 1950s, Alan Lomax held different opinions on African Americans who practised ‘white man’ music and preaching, or even used written musical notes, as being less authentic. For example, in a letter he sent to his father in 1935 while on a recording trip to Miami, he wrote: ‘The prayers and sermons I recorded have not been particularly good. I’m quite disappointed in them, but they are important perhaps, if only they show what the Negro does even when he copies the white man word for word, even when he reads a white sermon, as one old fool of a preacher did, when I asked him to record.’ (Lomax & Cohen 4).

period's popular and close-knit dialogue between social sciences and pseudo-scientific fields. Kimberlé Crenshaw contends that the particular ideas of progress associated with the Black elite and Black leadership had a devastating (and often contradictory) effect on the very possibility of establishing Black leadership for the benefit of Black people. She asserts that many Black leaders held ideas about progress that contributed to the internalisation of the policing of Black intellectuals' imagination and possibilities ('Under the Blacklight'). Similarly, when Work III depicted the African American street performers in Nashville as being part of a 'lower caste but no lower inspiration' (*American Negro Songs* 44-5), he was using what Isabel Wilkerson calls the grammar and structure of an artificial system that was invented to subjugate people (*Caste* 15-20). Yet, the second part of Work III's phrase – about the performers' inspiration – is a testament to these musicians' capabilities and qualities and should be read as a moment of tension whereby Work III is also pulling away from the first part of the phrase. Michael Collins, who writes specifically on Du Bois, claims that such attitudes and tendencies should be interpreted as 'markers of a will to survive and thrive in an unjust world' (586). These issues were pertinent to the work and positionality of Work III's father. Garcia frames Work II's use of music 'as an avenue to champion the Black man's struggle for full citizenship, equality and acceptance as one worthy of respect in this country' citing Work II's 1923 article 'Negro Folk Song' in the journal *Opportunity* as an example of that (Garcia 69).

In her research on *Opportunity*'s coverage of media content during the period when it was edited by Charles S. Johnson (1923-1928), Anne Carroll defines the journal's mission as an attempt to counteract the stereotypical and demeaning representations of African Americans in the white press. She writes that 'Johnson had used *Opportunity* to present different images, ones that demonstrated the achievements of African Americans and their contribution to American society and culture' (607). She also stresses that Johnson believed

or hoped that these contributions would bear social and political implications ‘that... would change how African Americans were thought about, how they were treated, and what opportunities were open to them’ (607). The way Carroll frames Johnson’s approach resonates with the work of both Work III and his father within the contours of national belonging:

Johnson valued both integration and the preservation of unique aspects of black culture, and the fact that he saw them as complementary rather than at odds suggests a model of American national development that moves away from assimilation and homogenization toward a form of integration that allows for the preservation of cultural distinctiveness. (Carroll 608)

Work II wrote that the spirituals are the only authentically American folk songs and Work III’s article ‘A New American Form’ argued that ‘the arranged spiritual must be recognized now as a distinctive, new, original American musical form’ (‘A New American Form’ 41-2).

At the same time, it is evident that Work III held an additional desire that has led his collecting ventures and conclusions closer to what Saidiya Hartman calls a speculative project. Hartman says: ‘I think that to imagine Black life and to imagine Black life thriving under these conditions is a speculative project’ (‘Under the Blacklight’). Building on Hartman’s ideas, I frame Work III’s work in general, and specifically his decision to focus on the changes led by Reverend Hill in his church and community, as a manifestation of his desire to see Black lives thriving, to see this Black community resisting the social and material conditions forced upon them. This desire was demonstrated to an even greater extent when Work III wrote to the Fisk administration about his determination to travel to Natchez, Mississippi, in Spring 1941 following The Rhythm Club Fire the previous year.<sup>128</sup> On the occasion of the first commemoration of this traumatic event, Work III wrote, ‘a new body of

---

<sup>128</sup> An extensive ethnographic exploration of the event and its cultural and social impact is provided in a doctoral dissertation by Vincent Joos, titled ‘The Natchez Fire: A profile of African American remembrance in a small Mississippi town’.

lore is due to be added. It is the ballads and music arising out of the holocaust of last April [...]’ (‘Folk Song Research’). A two-fold intention can be detected in Work III’s plans for the study – to focus on the community’s process of mourning through ‘various social activities in which this music is used’ in church services or religious pageants, and to reflect on the community’s process of recovery and the will to resume its livelihood through the music played by labourers and entertainers (‘Folk Song Research’). Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2016) provides a useful frame for understanding the Black community of Natchez and Work III’s attention to the dead and the bereaved, to the rituals of death and mourning, in terms of care and the stakes involved. She asks:

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death. It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living. (Sharpe 14-15)

The Black community of Natchez was facing the unfathomable challenge of tending the dead and their memory, but also engaging with the needs of the people mourning their losses and resuming their lives. Similarly to Sharpe, I suggest viewing Work III’s attention to that ‘work’ as an act of care extended to the dead and to the living. I argue that his determination to find songs or music at this time in Natchez and situating this practice within the community’s process of recovery from the immeasurable loss of two hundred of its people was a ‘speculative project’. It was an attempt to imagine ‘Black life’ when there was so much loss. In an article published in *The Atlantic* from 2016, Karla F.C. Holloway, stated that the concept (and practice) of ‘homegoing’, the African American tradition of burial, is all about the ‘idea of a celebration of life’ and can often be in ‘a contradiction to the ways in which many black bodies come to die’ (Stanley).

The particular sense of urgency embedded in Work III’s collecting practice thus differs from the familiar brand of urgency commonly associated with salvage ethnography, or



that which led to his father's moniker – a 'rescuer' of Black folk music (Dyson et. al 873). The urgency Work III attached to his work, I argue, was connected to issues of memory, recovery, trauma and loss. The songs were not detached from material, social and political conditions. For example, for Work III, work songs 'form a clear reflection of [the African American's] life during reconstruction' (*American Negro Songs* 37). Working conditions were captured in the famous verse 'I work from kin to can't – from the time I first kin see till I can't see' (37). The precarious pay and the exploitation of Black workers are depicted in the following song notated by Work III:

"O Captain, my han's is cold."  
"Doggone yo' han's let the wheeler roll!"  
"O Captain has de money come?"  
"Tain't non o'yo' bizness I don't owe you none!" (37)

Work III viewed and valued the new musical forms that emerged when some others were lost. Before he distanced himself from the position that deplores the gradual disappearance of certain musical folk forms, Work III expressed a sense of regret about the potential losses:

Any person who has been stirred by the spirited singing of a folk congregation's rendering of "Rock Mt. Sinai," "I'm Working on the building," or "When the Gen'l Roll is Called" must join with these writers in hoping that such singing will never be allowed to pass away ('Changing Patterns' 136).

But he soon added that while a certain style of singing and type of song had 'nearly disappeared' it had not entirely 'passed away'; it had only 'passed over into another type of singing and song' ('Changing Patterns' 136). Even with these evolutions, Work III explained, a visitor to the Southern Black folk churches would hear an interesting range of music including traditional hymnody, traditional spirituals, and even 'Dr. Watts', but also 'some exciting new music' (136). His book *American Negro Songs* is full of these kinds of contradictions, which I argue show his attempt to take part in the discourse of folklorists

premised on the project of preservation before extinction, but also his openness to be challenged by what he found in the field which might exceed this dichotomic understanding of the world of folk. For example, in his book's fourth chapter titled 'Work Songs', Work III claimed that the jazz bands and the phonograph 'started the declining popularity of these [work] songs' (44), yet in the second chapter titled 'The Spirituals' he argued that the phonograph recordings of these songs did not 'destroy their "folkness"' (29).

More radically, Work III rejected the stance of most of the folk and blues scholars on technology as the greatest threat to blues, a genre considered to be the archetype of raw authenticity. I argue that Work III's position worked in tandem with his desire to use the movie camera to document the sonic, performative and collaborative expressions discussed earlier in this chapter. The speculative quality of Work III's research and its technological angles stood in contrast with white collectors' obsession with and articulation of African American primitivism. For example, Work III wrote that 'the same person who formerly created the blues for her use and the entertainment of her immediate audience, now creates them for phonograph recordings and justifiably so' (29). This quote and a great part of Work III's chapter on the blues relate to a female blues musician, even before any names are mentioned: 'To a blues singer it simply raised the question, "Where can a po' girl go?"'. Work III's writing in this chapter presupposes the blues singer to be a woman. This presupposition shows the impact women have made on the genre and it also positions Work III at the forefront of the study of female blues singers. He stated with pride that Ma Rainey, had allowed him to interview her in the Douglas Hotel in Nashville where her company was performing. In this interview (which I could not trace as a stand-alone piece), she told him about how and when she heard the blues (Work III *American Negro Songs* 32-33).

In Work III's narration, the blues is lyrical and the spirituals have a collective focus. Individualistic, worldly and mundane, the blues as a genre reflects in a very candid manner

the interiority of its maker. Work III wrote that the blues serves to ‘embrace narrative and philosophical versions of disillusioned love affairs, dissatisfaction and misfortune’ (29). It is blunt, honest and intimate, and much of its verse is ‘unprintable’ (28). At the same time, Work III identified in it ‘sad and sorrowful’ qualities ‘interspersed with bits of humor’ (29).

Like Rev. Hill, Work III accommodated to the inevitable changes brought about by technological and commercialising trends, and sought to justify the musicians’ choices and keenness to reap the possibilities of these innovations. Work III saw technological developments such as phonograph records as accelerators of existing processes: ‘now a new blues may be heard in all sections of the country in the short period of a month or less after issuing of the record, whereas formerly it probably took years for one to become known and sung generally’ (29). What I consider to be so radical in Work III’s statement here is not only the rejection of the threat ingrained in a narrow and stagnant configuration of authenticity, but that his endorsement of the new technology and its distribution was prioritising the point of view of the performer – in Work III’s case, the African American women musicians – rather than the audience (which varies) or scholars who were in most cases white.

Work III rejected the purist criticism that argued that once folk musicians were exposed to commercially produced blues, they would largely imitate the music heard on records which in turn would impact their repertoires and diminish or erase local traditions. Work III contended that the “‘taking over” of the blues by the folk’ would not cease, explaining that ‘the individual singing it almost always gives her own coloring to the song by modifying, omitting, and adding lines’ (29). The folk musician’s creativity, ingenuity and skills of improvisation are not arrested by access to records or by the ensuing acceleration in the circulation of music. Work III’s approach thus involved a rare lens of care in which the ‘folk’ and folk expressions were not treated as monolithic entities, commodities to be consumed, and artifacts to be preserved. It is telling that the title of his book did not even

mention the word 'folk'. Reading between his lines and across these tensions, I suggest replacing the concept of folk, which has been imbued with a variety of stereotypes and connotations relating to class, caste, education and progress, with the word 'tradition'. Tradition should be used not as something which opposes the idea of modernity, but rather to help rightfully position Work III's approach and practice alongside those of African American literary modernism and the Black Atlantic, as suggested by Gilroy. As Langston Hughes argued in 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain' in 1926, there is an alternative model to the upper- and middle-class African Americans who internalise white society's expectations and are ashamed of any patterns that are 'not Caucasian', which they try to uproot (56).

Hughes wrote:

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. Whereas the better-class Negro would tell the artist what to do, the people at least let him alone when he does appear. And they are not ashamed of him--if they know he exists at all. And they accept what beauty is their own without question. (56)

Tradition as a framework enables a discussion which is not established on othering and is less harmful and limiting than the theoretical framework of folklore as it has been structured by its white progenitors and narrators. Tradition allows us to think about both the folk song and blues as vanguards of modernism rather than relics of the past. Also, the tracing of tradition was what enabled Work II to create links with his ancestors and redress the disruption at the heart of slavery since its beginning. Tradition, as explained in this chapter, was also what Work, Work II and Work III sought to bequeath to future generations.

## **Conclusion**

The order of the chapters in the dissertation reflects the order of the research and the writing process. At several moments, I asked myself if this dissertation should be focused exclusively on African American collectors. I was concerned that the inclusion of Ruby Pickens Tartt – a white collector who enacted the structures and practices that this dissertation criticises and rejects – could weaken the dissertation's overall contribution. However, halfway through the research and writing process and even more strongly toward the end, it became very clear that my initial intuition to place Pickens Tartt at the start of the dissertation was a valid and productive strategy. It helped me reach the understanding that ‘Reclaiming the Lore’ is a multifaceted proposition that could not consist only of outstanding projects by Black collectors who succeeded in their missions notwithstanding the monopoly of white collectors. After all, even if the primary focus on Black collectors sought to remedy important omissions in the historical picture of the field of collecting, the question of white collectors’ physical and symbolic removal of African Americans’ cultural expressions and traditions from the individuals and communities who created them should still be addressed. It was still necessary to bring to the fore what was removed, challenge its status within the archives, and evaluate what transpired when artefacts and records were used to furnish white archives and institutions.

In her 1979 essay ‘Sambos and Minstrels’, Sylvia Wynter writes about the appropriation and distortion of the Black minstrel tradition by white people. She notes that ‘the incredible inventiveness of black culture is not to be understood outside the imperative tasks of transformation, of counterresistance to the resistance of the Real world, to the quest of the marked excluded blacks to affirm themselves’ (149). Although white collectors’ engrossment in Black folk tradition was not the same as the minstrel shows’ attempts to ridicule, dehumanise and subjugate Black people, it reproduced and maintained harmful

stereotypes that repudiated and prevented the progress of Black communities and the amelioration of oppression. Furthermore, such manifest engrossment also affected the way Black singers and musicians could affirm themselves. Wynter urges us not to forget that engrossment and appropriation were carried on within the same structures of domination designed during slavery and were demonstrated with the minstrels' shows. She writes that the 'minstrels shows, like the rest of black culture – its spirituals, its blues, its jazz – were incorporated in a form that kept its relative exclusion intact' (149). As this dissertation has shown, such exclusion was expanded to impede Black people from inhabiting the collector's position and was predicated on the grave separation of the Black individuals and communities who sang these songs from the realities narrated in the songs. Black music and culture, Wynter adds, 'became an original source of raw material to be exploited as the entertainment industry burgeoned. Once again blacks function as the plantation subproletariat hidden in raw material' (149).

When music gathered by white collectors continues to be treated as an 'original source of raw material', we must question whether and how institutions reproduce the same conditions in which Black people's lore was extracted from them in the first place. Recent events regarding materials collected between 1933 and 1978 by Lomax and 'various associates' in the Mississippi Delta, now repatriated to the Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, raises alarming questions about some of the decisions involved. In 2018, the Association of Cultural Equity (ACE) which had been founded by Alan Lomax in the 1980s chose to repatriate this collection, the large bulk of which is the 1941/2 Coahoma Study by Fisk University and the LoC (described in chapter four of this dissertation). Bringing these materials back to the region of the Mississippi Delta is an important step toward re-balancing this history. However, the fact that the story arc of the materials is still centered around Lomax and continues to glorify his work serves to reproduce the same

archival violence discussed at length in chapter two and four. The programme of events marking the repatriation, together with the account appearing on the ACE website and the repatriation dossier that describe the repatriation work, ignores the prevailing lines of critique<sup>129</sup> and refrains from acknowledging the time that had passed and the disparity between Lomax's life and career and the lives of the individuals and communities that he recorded and those of their descendants. The ACE still holds the power, shapes the narrative and dictates the terms of the repatriation – when, where and how. Despite the university's location in the Delta region and its relevant public and educational programmes on the history and cultural legacy of the Mississippi Delta, it must be recognised that the institution where these materials have been deposited was for decades serving the education of white people only. Moreover, until 1967, twelve years after the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and three years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, this university still denied admission to African American people.

The episode begs the question of why these materials were not deposited in one of the local HBCUs which would have enjoyed the National Endowment for the Arts funding that this project received, and would have benefited from the exposure and appeal that comes with hosting such a rich collection. After all, the highlight of the collection (as all the documents note) is the Coahoma Study which not only originated in an HBCU (Fisk) but also resulted in the marginalisation of its three African American researchers for decades. Instead, like other

---

<sup>129</sup> Many scholars have pointed out Alan Lomax's exploitative practices especially in the prison farms such as Parchman (Mississippi) and Angola (Louisiana) which he had visited with his father and by himself since the 1930s. John Lomax justified their visits to these prisons as the places to find songs which were 'the least contaminated by white influence or modern Negro Jazz' (Lomax 'Sinful Songs' 181). In their accounts of their visits, both Alan and John Lomax noted instances of reluctant cooperation by the Black prisoners who were forced to sing by the wardens wielding power or threat. Dwandalyn Reece from the National Museum of African American History and Culture argued that Lomax's musical choices contributed to the stereotypes of African Americans as criminals and illiterates. The authenticity he was searching for and reproducing was 'rooted in having that kind of vision of what African-American can or cannot be' ('How Alan Lomax Segregated Music?'). For more on this subject, see Karl Hagstrom Miller's *Segregating Sound*, Sally Ann Schutz's 'Grey-Washing Jim Crow', Benjamin Filene's 'Our Singing Country' and Mark Davidson who in 'The Problem of Alan Lomax' bluntly pondered 'Given what we know about Lomax's fieldwork co-creator-credit practices, how transparent have these repatriation efforts been able to be?'

diversity and inclusion initiatives taking place in universities throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, the white control is kept intact. In the case of the ACE, that white control was also wrapped within a cloak of patriotic, multi-cultural sentiment as articulated in the foreword written by Lomax's daughter and the president of the association: 'In America, we are all immigrants, all strangers, sufferers, some more than others, but we can and must make something better of it now, knowing and feeling what is behind us' ('Repatriation' 4).

'Reclaiming the Lore' aimed to go beyond the task of reintegration of Black collectors and their practice; it is also about making ways and finding means to rethink and reuse these white collectors' archives and collections against their grain. 'Reclaiming the Lore' is about the people – singers, musicians, performers – their stories, their lives, their experiences, their voices, how they sought to affirm themselves. It is about protecting their knowledge and expertise from being appropriated as raw materials that build the expertise and reputations of white people and institutions. It is this idea which made the chapter on Ruby Pickens Tartt integral to this project of reclamation, but not as a chapter where the central protagonist is the collector alone. Once I understood this, the challenge was how to attend to and foreground the performers' participation not as 'raw material' to be collected, but as curatorial practices for their own music in ways that undermine Pickens Tartt's role as a collector of 'raw material'. Writing this chapter was also important in questioning the status of collecting when it is pursued by people in positions external to the communities who are creating the music under the given racial structure. The chapter provided an analysis of the history and conditions that enabled Pickens Tartt's entry to the field to become a collector. It revealed the intertwined relationship between labour, exploitation and entertainment within the domestic sphere and pointed to the condition of proximity within the Jim Crow system of separation. At the same time, the chapter analysed the process of appropriation and exclusion, as Wynter depicts it, and sought ways to challenge it. Thus, the chapter also followed Hettie



Godfrey, who learned songs from her mother and passed on those gifts and that knowledge to her daughter Annie: songs that soothe, songs that warn of danger, songs that elicit laughter, songs that create bonds. It followed Vera Hall, who learned songs from her mother and sang with her cousin Doc Reed and with members of the Old Shiloh Baptist Church. The chapter reframed the practices of both women as part of an organic system – a radical Black ecology of song and tradition rooted in and dependent on performance and collectiveness. As such, the chapter undermined the status and authority of white dominant narratives and forms of knowledge.<sup>130</sup>

The understanding of the destruction of Black life and the efforts to preserve Black traditions as being two entwined processes enacted by the same dominant group demands a new look at what is, or what was, happening before the white collectors' entrance to the field. By 'what was', I am not referring to the roots of musical and other cultural traditions in the African continent, which is an important route that many writers have articulated before. Focusing on 'what was' is an attempt to rethink what transpired before such white collectors appeared with their intentions to preserve without the capacity or willingness to acknowledge that the moment they stepped over the door threshold, something had already changed and was under threat. By adopting the framework of Black ecologies, we affirm the sustainability of folk tradition whereby collecting occurs within the community as an integral part of the collective process of sustaining folk traditions, embedded in performance but not superseding it. Not only does the framework situate any external attempt to collect and preserve as unnecessary, but it also resituates the performers in positions of power and autonomy over

---

<sup>130</sup> I was inspired to think about radical Black ecologies by Romy Opperman who provides an expansive approach toward what constitutes ecology and its critique of human-made systems. Opperman writes: 'by *radical Black ecology* I mean Black thinkers, movements, and communities that have refused the ruse that capitalism, the state, heteropatriarchy, and the domination of more-than-human nature are the means and ends of justice and freedom' (Opperman). Black ecologies of songs and tradition were for generations a refusal of all of these things. Moreover, James Padilioni Jr. wrote about Hurston's collecting work in Florida and its relation to Black ecologies, approaching lore as a vital metaphysical element of a sustainable community (Padilioni Jr.).

their tradition and its preservation. Before the dissertation proceeded to the African American collectors, it was vital to re-establish the centrality of performance and re-assert the performers' positions of knowledge and authority rather than locating the expertise in the hands of the white collectors and their writings.

The second chapter – on Zora Neale Hurston – served as an interlude of a sort. As Hurston is the most well-known figure in this dissertation and the subject of much existing scholarship, I felt relieved of the task of seeking to present her biography in full or to address her entire and vast body of work and the plethora of themes emerging from it. I could focus on one event which allowed further examination of the inextricable links between performance and collecting, and the power relations between white collectors (and national institutions) and Hurston as an African American collector, within the context of segregation during the New Deal years. Hurston knew what was at stake when she watched Black people being probed to yield their folklore and songs for collection and interpretation by generations of white collectors. That is why she had offered her own 'bed of resistance' to Halpert and Kennedy who came to probe, but they too were 'smothered under laughter and pleasantries' (*Mules and Men* 2-3). Explaining her rationale for such tactics, Hurston wrote:

The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song. (*Mules and Men* 3)

The discussion of Hurston's embodied archive showed how performativity was integral to her collecting methods and part of the model of preservation and dissemination. Hurston's embodied archive served as a means to negotiate white people's attempts to 'know somebody else's business' by positioning her in control of the songs she collected. This embodied archive enabled her to provide the care she thought was needed to guard these songs and their legacies from misuse or misinterpretation within the national archive in which her own archive was entrapped. The performative aspect embedded in Hurston's practice could be

found also in the practice of Willis Laurence James's lecture-demonstration model. Under this model, James shared the songs he collected and the stories he heard, and he depicted the places where they had grown. All the while, he kept control of the repertoire and judged what should remain private and concealed and what could be uttered or revealed to certain audiences under certain circumstances. In an essay dedicated to James and his collecting practice, the poet Sterling A. Brown claims that James had been in some ways opposed to recording or weary of it. Brown was chiding James for this resistance and humorously 'accused him of hoarding, of unwillingness to share his rich finds'. Brown then explains that '[James] didn't like the uses that the recording companies made of the stuff. It belonged to the people; then others got hold of it and it wasn't the people's any longer' (Brown *A Negro Looks* 266). This quote succinctly characterises James's approach as one that is fundamentally protective and caring.

In the cases of James, John W. Work II and John W. Work III, it became clear that recording was only one aspect of their practice of collecting and it was intertwined with new pedagogical methods that they developed in accordance with and indeed reliant on performative practice. In studying the performative dimensions of the practice of these four African American collectors alongside each other, one can see that their creative and inventive methods also grew out of the problem of limited access to the recording equipment they desired.

Scrutiny of these performative aspects opened up a rich terrain of anti-imperial or anti-colonial possibilities in thinking about archival projects. This terrain required further exploration and it offered different perspectives on aspects of archiving including scale, memorialisation, temporality, use and audiences/readership. The third and fourth chapters on James and the Work family respectively also touched upon the collaborative element of collecting which opens up another route for future research into 'Reclaiming the Lore' for it

presses further the potentiality of reintegrating the ‘folk’ – the people – into the narrative as interlocutors.

The transformed map of the field of collecting that this dissertation offers also points to the urgency of a complete charting of HBCU and their importance and in doing so to show that this Black ecology of song and tradition was and is profoundly African American and not white as we were taught. I have attempted to convey this importance in the chapters on James and the Work family which highlighted the crucial role that music education and performance played in the institutions with which these individuals were involved: Morehouse, Leland, Spelman, Alabama State Normal, Spelman and Fisk, among others. This HBCU history deserves independent research and requires a collaborative approach that explores these networks across disciplines and sectors, and across geographic and historical vectors. Such a project should employ local and regional research and community-based participation. It should study the work not just of historically Black colleges universities but also mutual aid associations, funeral homes, churches, musical associations and workers’ unions, and should extend to classical composers and musicians.

In the framework of this dissertation, I discussed these institutions in the chapters on the Work family and James. However, it is important to emphasise that Hurston’s journey was also interlinked with black schools and HBCU, starting with the one year she studied as a boarder at the Florida Baptist Academy in Jacksonville following her mother’s untimely death (and until her father stopped the tuition payments), through her time at Morgan Academy in Baltimore where she graduated high school at the age of 27, to her studies at Howard University in Washington D.C. intermittently between 1920 and 1924. Hurston also taught in a handful of institutions (albeit briefly in some): Bethune-Cookman College in 1934, where she was involved in founding the school of dramatic arts; North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham; what is now known as Florida Memorial University where she taught for short

periods from the late 1930s to the early 1940s; and Lincoln Park Academy in the late 1950s. At Bethune-Cookman College, she even received an award in 1956 for 'Education and Human Relations'. Hurston's relation to and investment in education in the Black community in the South is territory that had been neglected and deserves further exploration, especially regarding her use of folk materials from her own collection in her teaching. The fact that Hurston did not have any long-term employment relationship with any institution made her life more precarious and undoubtedly affected her living conditions as well as the recognition she received toward the end of her life and the memorialisation of her life and work after her passing. There may be many reasons why Hurston's employment situations were always short-lived. They could partly relate to the mobility and independence she needed to pursue her collecting work and her creative endeavours, but this does not seem to be the major reason. Future research into these relationships with educational institutions must be attentive to the intersecting powers of gender and racial inequalities that made the possibilities of securing tenure even more unlikely, as an episode at Fisk shows. In 1934, Hurston was in discussion with Thomas Elsa Jones, then president of Fisk University, about her appointment as a full professor and specifically to establish and chair an 'experimental theatre' department at Fisk (Kaplan *Zora Neale Hurston* 310). The Rosenwald Fund which initially had supported and intended to subsidise such a position then changed their mind and offered Hurston a fellowship for graduate studies at Columbia – support which was ultimately withdrawn and contributed to the fact that she never completed her doctoral degree. Hurston believed that Jones was involved in the Fund's change of position, as he was close friends with Edwin Embree, the president of the Fund. She wrote in a letter that Jones 'did something to me, which I still think was patronizing and contemptible. I told him immediately that I resented it and thought he ran his school like a Georgia plantation' (Kaplan *Zora Neale Hurston* 399). Hurston speculated that Jones had told Embree about it and by doing that he proved to her

that ‘in his heart he felt that N- should stay in their places and not talk biggity to white folks no matter how justified the provocation’ (399). A letter she wrote to James Weldon Johnson at the time of these discussions attests to her willingness to sacrifice her mobility and independence in order to commit to such a project, for she believed in its importance: ‘Frankly I am asking you to use your prestige, well, not against me. [...] One point that he [Jones] wants to be sure on is that after Fisk has spent her money on me that I will stick. I certainly will.’ (310). To president Jones she wrote ‘I would love to work out some of my visions at Fisk University because there, more than anywhere in America [...] I believe I can add something to your already rich endowment’ (318). On multiple occasions, Hurston referred to the commitment of members of the existing Black faculty to the study and enlivening of folk music and culture. She mentioned Charles S. Johnson in sociological research, Lorenzo Dow Turner in linguistic and cultural research among the Gullah, and John Work III. To contemplate Hurston fulfilling this dream project generates echoes of the sense of loss described in this dissertation’s introduction regarding the missed meeting points and collaborative potentialities that were not actualised. This painful sense of lost opportunity was expressed in the way Hurston wrote to Jones about Work III when she realised that her appointment would not happen. She conveyed a deep sense of care and collegiality: ‘I think it would be nice to give it to Mr. John Work in acknowledgement of his strenuous effort in that direction. He is a bright young man and deserved some recognition of his talents [...] Give him the job by all means and if he runs out of ideas he can always come to me under the guise of friendship and get some more’ (Kaplan 329).

While each of these collectors – and especially James, Work II and Work III who remain underexplored – deserves an extensive full-length biography and further exploration of their work, reading them together brought an intensity to the project even though they were viewed through the prisms of partial aspects of their practices and lives. By studying

trailblazers as a group I have come to realise that the participatory, intimate and caring practices of Hurston, James and the three members of the Work family have blurred the lines between 'collector' and 'performer'. It is thanks to their practice that I could conceptualise and find the words to articulate differently what collecting could mean.

### Work Cited:

‘How Alan Lomax Segregated Music.’ *WNYC*, 5 Feb. 1925.

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/how-alan-lomax-segregated-music/>.

‘History of Leland University (College), Baker, La.’ Southern University and A&M  
College-Archive Department-John B. Cade Library

<<https://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/digital/collection/suam/id/1418/>>.

‘Professor Work Called to Presidency of Roger Williams University.’ *Fisk University News*,  
Oct. 1923, p.8.

‘The ASU Legacy: Perseverance, Progress, Promise.’ Alabama State University.

[https://www.alasu.edu/about-asu/historytradition/asu-legacy-perseverance-progress-  
and-promise](https://www.alasu.edu/about-asu/historytradition/asu-legacy-perseverance-progress-and-promise).

“John Work, Martyr and Singer.” *Crisis* XXXII/1, May 1926, p. 32.

Abbott, Dorothy. ‘Recovering Zora Neale Hurston’s Work.’ *Frontiers: A Journal of Women  
Studies*, vol.12, no.1, 1991, pp. 174–81.

Abbott, Lynn and Doug Seroff, “*To Do This, You Must Know How*”: *Music Pedagogy in the  
Black Gospel Quartet Tradition*. University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

Abromeit, Kathleen A. *Spirituals: A Multidisciplinary Bibliography for Research and  
Performance*. Middleton. A-R Editions, Inc., 2001.

*Alabama 1901 Constitution*. Montgomery, Alabama: The State of Alabama, 1901. Section  
256.

Alabama Possible, ‘Building Alabama Together: 2018 Report to the Community’

<<https://alabamapossible.org/2018/12/18/2018eoy/>> .

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.  
The New Press, 2012.



Allen, Cleveland G. 'Negro in Music Sets High Goal of Endeavor.' *Musical America*, vol.

XLIII, no.1, 24 Oct. 1925, p.109.

Allen, Simona Atkins. 'John Wesley Work: A Profile.' *Fisk News*, Spring 1967, p.13

Allen, William Francis, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison, eds. *Slave Songs of the United States*. 1867. Dover Publication Inc., 1995.

Anderson, Carol. *White Rage The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016.

Anderson, James D. *The Education of Black in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Anderson, Toni P. "*Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus*": *The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian reconstruction, 1871-1878*. Mercer University Press, 2010.

Assu, Sonny. *(Un)Named Marker*. 2019, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

Ayewa, Camae. 'Moor Mother Tells The Story Behind Every Track On Her Radical New Record.' Interview by Maya Kalev. *Fader*. 22 Mar. 2017.

<https://www.thefader.com/2017/03/22/moor-mother-motionless-present-interview>.

Baker Jr., Huston A. *I Don't Hate the South: Reflections on Faulkner, Family and the South*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People: Negro music in white America*. W. Morrow, 1968.

Bastin, Bruce. *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast*. University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Beasley, Myron M. 'Performing Zora - Critical Ethnography, Digital Sound, And Not Forgetting.' *Digital Sound Studies*, edited by Mary Caton Lingold, Darren Mueller and Whitney Trettien, Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 47–63.

- Bennett Jr., Leronne. 'WHAT'S IN A NAME? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black.' *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 26, no. 4. 1969, pp. 399-412.
- Berlo, Janet Catherine, Ruth B. Phillips, Carol Duncan, Donald Preziosi, Danielle Rice, and Anne Rorimer. "The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1." *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1, 1995, pp. 6-24.
- Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar. 'Freedom.' *Lemonade*. Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records, 2016, track 10.
- Blacking, John. 'Some Problems of Theory and Method in the Study of Musical Change.' *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, vol. 9, 1977, pp. 1-26.
- Blassingame, John W. 'Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865-1880.' *Journal of Social History*, vol.6 no.4. summer, 1973, pp. 463-488.
- Bontemps, Alex. *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South*. Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Botkin, Benjamin A. *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*. 1945. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Bowman, Bryan and Kathy Roberts Forde, 'How Slave Labor Built the State of Florida – Decades After the Civil War.' *Washington Post*, 17 May, 2018.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/05/17/how-slave-labor-built-the-state-of-florida-decades-after-the-civil-war/>
- Boyd, Valerie. 'She Was the Party.' <https://www.zoranealehurston.com/resource/she-was-the-party-their-eyes-were-watching-god/>
- *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. Scribner, 2004.
- Bronner, Simon J. 'American Folklorists Voices in Print: A Critical Survey.' (presented at the Forum *Collecting Memories: The AFS Oral History Project* at the American

- Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, 2010.
- <https://archives.usu.edu/folklo/folkarchive/voices.pdf>.
- Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- “‘Sister, Can You Line It Out?’: Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood.’ *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no .4, African American Literary Studies: New Texts, New Approaches, New Challenges, 2010, pp. 617–27.
- Brooks, Tim. “‘Might Take One Disc of This Trash as Novelty’”: Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization of “Negro Folk Music.” *American Music*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2000, pp. 278-316.
- Brown, Alan and David Taylor. eds., *Gabrl Blow Sof: Sumter County, Alabama, Slave Narratives (Ruby Pickens Tartt , Vol 2)*. Livingston Press, 1997.
- Brown, Alan. ed., *Dim Roads and Dark Nights: the Collected Folklore of Ruby Pickens Tartt*. Livingston University Press, 1993.
- Brown, Jr., James Seay *Up Before Daylight: Life Histories from the Alabama Writers' Project, 1938-1939*. University of Alabama Press, 1982.
- Brown, Sterling A. *Sterling A. Brown's A Negro Looks at the South*, edited by John Edgar Tidwell and Mark A. Sanders, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Brown, Virginia and Laurella Owens. Manuscript. kept by Tina Naremore Jones, University of West Alabama.
- Brown, Virginia Pounds and Laurella Owens. *Toting the Lead Row: Ruby Pickens Tartt, Alabama Folklorist*. University of Alabama Press, 1981.
- Burgan, Mary. ‘Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction.’ *Victorian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1986, pp. 51-76.

- Burnim, Mellonee V. and K. Portia Maulsby, editors. *African American Music: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2014.
- Butler, Octavia. 'Octavia Butler Interview', Charlie Rose Show, PBS, 2000.  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66pu-Miq4tk&feature=youtu.be>>.
- Butler, Reverend Robert Jr., contributor. 'Through Many Dangers: The Story of Gospel Music', *Omnibus*. BBC One, 1996.
- Calhoun-Brown, Allison. 'Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement.' *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol.33, no. 2, 2000, pp. 168–74.
- Campanella, Richard. 'A Tale of Two Universities: Leland, Tulane and an Early Example of Gentrification.' *Nola.Com*, New Orleans, 6 May 2015.
- Campt, Tina. 'Black Visual Frequency: A Glossary - Refusal.' *Still Searching...*, 2018  
<[https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155142\\_refusal](https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155142_refusal)> .  
---'Black visibility and the practice of refusal.' *Women & Performance*, 25 Feb. 2019.  
<https://www.womenandperformance.org/ampersand/29-1/campt>
- Cappetti, Carla and Zora Neale Hurston. 'Defending Hurston against Her Legend: Two Previously Unpublished Letters.' *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4 African American Literary Studies: New Texts, New Approaches, New Challenges, 2010, pp. 602–14.
- Carmer, Carl. *Miss Ruby, My Most Unforgettable Character*. Livingston University Press, 1975.
- Carroll, Anne. "'Sufficient in Intensity": Mixed Media and Public Opinion in "Opportunity.'" *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 80, no. 4, 1997, pp. 607-40.
- Castiglia, Christopher. 'Abolition's Racial Interiors and the Making of White Civic Depth.' *American Literary History*, vol. 14, no.1, spring 2002, pp. 32-59.

Cataloging of Popular & Traditional Music Sound Recordings.’

<https://web.library.yale.edu/book/export/html/1583>>.

Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*. North Carolina University Press, 2016.

Clark, Edgar Rogie. ‘Music Education in Negro Schools and Colleges.’ *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol.9, no. 4, 1940, pp. 580–9.

Clarke, Eileen. ‘The Day Fame Came to the People.’ *New York Magazine*, 14 Feb. 1994, p. 22.

Cleland, Herdman Fitzgerald. ‘The Black Belt of Alabama.’ *Geographical Review*, vol.10, no. 6, 1920, pp. 375-87.

Clifford, James. ‘The Others: Beyond the ‘salvage’ paradigm.’ *Third Text*, vol.3, no. 6, pp. 73-8.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. ‘Opening Statement at the House hearing on H.R. 40.’ 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcCnQ3iRkys> see full transcript here:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/ta-nehisi-coates-testimony-house-reparations-hr-40/592042/>

College Factual, ‘University of West Alabama Student Population Stats.’

<https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-of-west-alabama/student-life/diversity/>

Collins, Michael. ‘W.E.B. Du Bois’s Neurological Modernity: I.Q., Afropessimism, Genre.’

*The Palgrave Handbook of Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature and*

*Science* edited by The Triangle Collective. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp 559-576.

- Collins, Patricia Hill. 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought.' *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 4, Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives, 1989, pp. 745–73.
- Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Conforth, Bruce. *African American Folksong and American Cultural Politics: The Lawrence Gellert Story*. Scarecrow Press, 2013.
- Conquergood, Dwight. 'Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.' *TDR (The Drama Review)*, vol. 46, 2002, pp. 145–56.
- Cooper, Brittney. 'Eloquent Rage: Brittney Cooper Knows the Beauty of the "Angry Black Woman"'. Interview by Maisha Kai. *The Root*. 20 Mar. 2018.  
<https://theglowup.theroot.com/eloquent-rage-brittney-cooper-knows-the-beauty-of-the-1823684559>
- 'Harnessing The Power Of "The Angry Black Woman"', Interviewed by Mayowa Aina, *All Things Considered*. 24 Feb. 2019.  
<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/24/689925868/harnessing-the-power-of-the-angry-black-woman>.
- Couch, W. T. 'Memorandum Concerning Proposed Plans for Work of the Federal Writers' Project in the South.' 11 Jul. 1928. FWP Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Courlander, Harold. *Negro Folk Music of Alabama*. Folkways Ethnic Library, 1951. Two albums, each containing 4 double-sided 10-inch discs, 78 r.p.m.
- The Big Old World of Richard Creeks*. Chilton Company, 1962.

- Cowie, Jefferson and Nick Salvatore. 'The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History.' *International Labor and Working Class History*, vol. 74, fall, 2008, pp. 3-32.
- Crawford, Margaret. *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*. Verso, 1995.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 'Under the Blacklight: Storytelling While Black and Female: Conjuring Beautiful Experiments.' 2020.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGS5aP5Vi7g>.
- Cureau, Rebecca T. 'Willis Laurence James (1900-1966): Musician, Music Educator, Folklorist.' doctoral dissertation, Atlanta University, 1987.
- Data USA, Livingston, Al., 2018, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/livingston-al#about>.
- Davidson, Mark. 'The Problem of Alan Lomax, or The Necessity of Talking Politics During the Lomax Year.' *Sounding Out*, 9 Apr. 2015.
- deGregory, Crystal A. 'Sandra Bland did not kill herself.' *The Atlanta Voice*, 9 May, 2019.
- Dennis, Routledge M. 'Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and Metaphysics of Race.' *Journal of Negro Education*, summer 1995, pp. 243-52.
- Dett. R. Nathaniel. 'Emancipation of Negro Music.' *Southern Workman*, vol. XLIV, 1918, 172.
- 'John W. Work.' *Southern Workman*, vol. LIV, no.10, October 1925, p.438.
- Diduck, Ryan. 'All *Play* and No Work: How Moby's bestselling album damaged electronic music.' *Fact Magazine*, 2019. <https://www.factmag.com/2019/05/15/moby-play-20-years/>
- Dobbs, Mattiwilda. 'Operatic Sensation Mattiwilda Dobbs Breaks Through Barriers of Segregation.' *Our Stories*, Spelman website, April, 2016.  
<https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/news-and-events/our->

[stories/stories/2016/04/01/operatic-sensation-mattawilda-dobbs-breaks-through-barriers-of-segregation](https://www.stories/stories/2016/04/01/operatic-sensation-mattawilda-dobbs-breaks-through-barriers-of-segregation).

Dorson, Richard M. *Folklore: Selected Essays*. Indiana University Press, 1972.

Dougan, John. 'Reviewed Work: Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-42 by John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, Samuel C. Adams, Robert Gordon, Bruce Nemerov.' *The World of Music*, vol.49, no.2, 2007, pp. 143–45.

Douglass, Frederick. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time*. Digital Scanning Inc, 2001.

--- 'The Hutchinson Family. – Hunkerism.' *The North Star*, 27 Oct. 1848.

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miar03bt.html>

--- *My Bondage and My Freedom*. 1855. Ebook #202, Project Gutenberg.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm>

Du Bois, W. E. B. 'The American Negro at Paris.' *American Monthly Review of Reviews* vol.22, no. 5, November, 1900.

--- *Black Reconstruction in America*. 1935. Free Press, 1998.

--- *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Yale University Press, 2015.

Dunn, Andrew and James Marsh, 'Through Many Dangers: The Story of Gospel Music.' BBC One, 1996.

Dyson, Omari L., Judson L. Jeffries, Kevin L. Brooks, editors. *African American Culture: An Encyclopedia of People, Traditions, and Customs*. ABC-CLIO, 2020.

Farnell, Brenda. 'Birdwhistell, Hall, Lomax and the Origins of Visual Anthropology.' *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 16, 2003, pp. 43-5.



- Favor, J. Martin. *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance*. Duke University Press, 1999.
- Female Group & Zema Hill Church, 'I Am His, He Is Mine.' *Recording Black Culture*. Spring Fed, 2008, track no.5.
- Filene, Benjamin. "'Our Singing Country": John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past.' *American Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec., 1991, pp. 602-24.
- Floyd Jr., Samuel A. 'Dedication.' *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 1, 1980.
- 'The Negro Renaissance: Harlem and Chicago Flowerings.' in *The Black Chicago Renaissance*, edited by , Darlene Clark and John McClusky Jr., University of Illinois Press, 2012, 21-34.
- *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Foster, Lenoar. 'Not So-Invisible: White Faculty at the Black College.' *Urban Education*, vol. 36, no.5, 2001, pp. 611-29.
- Gallagher W., Garry and Alan T. Nolan. *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*. Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Garabedian, Steven. 'Reds, Whites, and the Blues: Lawrence Gellert, "Negro Songs of Protest" and Leftwing Folksongs Revival of the 1930s.' *American Quarterly*, vol. 57, March, 2005, pp. 179-206.
- Garcia, William Bures. 'The Life and Choral Music of John Wesley Work 1901-1967.' doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1973.
- Gasman, Marybeth. 'Instilling an Ethic of Leadership at Fisk University in the 1950s.' *Journal of College and Character*, vol. 2, no.2, 2001.

- Gay, Roxane. 'On the Death of Sandra Bland and Our Vulnerable Bodies.' *New York Times*, 14 May, 2018.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. 1972. Vintage Books, 1976.
- George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. Wesleyan University Press, 1987.
- Gilroy, Paul. 'Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a "Changing" Same.' *Black Music Research Journal*, vol.11, no. 2, 1991, pp. 111–36.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/779262](http://www.jstor.org/stable/779262).
- *The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity*. Verso, 1993.
- Glover, Gisele. 'The Life and Career of Edward Boatner and Inventory of the Boatner Papers at the Schomburg Center.' *American Music Research Center Journal*, 2013.  
<https://www.colorado.edu/amrc/sites/default/files/attached-files/0506-1998-008-00-000007.pdf>
- Godfrey, Hettie, John Avery Lomax and Ruby T. Lomax 'All Hid?' Livingston, Alabama, 1940. AFS 04017 B03. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 'Little Sally Walker' AFS 04017 B04.
- 'Won't that be a time' with Annie Godfrey. AFS 04019 A01 and AFS 04019 A02.
- 'I lost my needle' with Annie Godfrey. AFS 04018 B02.
- Golding, Viv and Wayne Modest, editors. *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*. A&C Black, 2013.
- Graham, Sandra. 'On the Road to Freedom: The Contracts of the Fisk Jubilee Singers.' *American Music*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2006, pp.1-29.
- Graziano, John. 'The Use of Dialect in African-American Spirituals, Popular Songs, and Folk Songs.' *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 261-86.

- Gussow, Adam. 'Adam Gussow Publishes New Book on the Devil in the Blues.' Interview by Scott Barretta. *Southern Register*, fall, 2017, pp. 14-5.
- Beyond the Crossroads: The Devil and the Blues Tradition*. North Carolina University Press, 2017.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1914*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010.
- Hall, Vera, John Avery Lomax and Ruby T. Lomax 'All Hid?', Livingston, Alabama, 1940.
- Halpert, Herbert. 'Coming into Folklore More than Fifty Years Ago.' *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 105, no. 418, 1992, pp. 422-57.
- Hamilton, Marybeth. *In Search of the Blues*. Basic Books, 2007.
- Hannah-Jones, Nikole, Mary Elliott, Jazmine Hughes, and Jake Silverstein, editors. 2019. *The 1619 project*: New York Times magazine, 18 Aug. 2019.
- Harreld Love, Josephine. 'Conversation with Josephine Harreld Love.' Interview by Jeffrey Green. *The Black Perspective in Music*. vol. 18, 1990, pp. 179-213.
- Harris, Joel Chandler. Introduction to 'Uncle Remus His: Songs and His Sayings' 1881.  
<http://www.telelib.com/authors/H/HarrisJoelChandler/prose/UncleRemus/introduction.html>
- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- 'Under the Blacklight: Storytelling While Black and Female: Conjuring Beautiful Experiments.' 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGS5aP5Vi7g>.
- 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no .2, 2008.
- *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. W. W. Norton, 2019.

Hayes, Diana L. 'A Great Cloud of Witnesses: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Roots in the African

American Religious and Spiritual Traditions.' *Revives My Soul Again: The*

*Spirituality of Martin Luther King Jr.*, edited by Lewis V. Baldwin and Victor

Anderson. Fortress Press, 2018, pp. 39–60.

Hemenway, Robert, E. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. University of Illinois

Press, 1980.

Hesmondhalgh, David. 'Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality.' *Social & Legal Studies*,

vol. 15, no. 1, 2006, pp. 53-75.

Holloway, Karla FC. *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories, A Memorial*. Duke

University Press, 2002.

hooks, bell. 'homeplace.' *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. South End

Press, 1990, pp. 41-51.

--- 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators.' *Black Looks: Race and*

*Representation*. South End Press, 1992, pp. 115-31.

--- *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press, 1989.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 'Gonna See My Long-Haired Babe.' Jacksonville Florida, 1939,

American Folklife Center, Herbert Halpert 1939 Southern States Recording

Expedition (AFC 1939/005) <<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000003/>>.

--- 'Characteristics of Negro Expression.' 1934. *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore*

*Writings of Zora Neale Hurston*. Turtle Island, 1981, pp. 49-69.

--- 'Florida's Migrant Farm Labor', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1,

1991, pp. 199–203.

--- 'How It Feels to Be Colored Me', in *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... A Zora Neale*

*Hurston Reader*, edited by Alice Walker, The Feminist Press at The City University of

New York, 1979.

- 'Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas.' 1939, American Folklife Center  
 <[https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc\\_corresp.afc\\_corresp\\_essay1/?st=list](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc_corresp.afc_corresp_essay1/?st=list)> .
- 'Concert.' 1942. *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, edited by Cheryl Wall, Library of America, 1995. 804-8.
- *Dust Tracks On A Road: An Autobiography*. 1942. Virago Press, 1986.
- *Go Gator and Muddy the Water*, edited by Pamela Bordelon, W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- 'Let the Deal Go Down.' Jacksonville Florida, 1939, American Folklife Center, Herbert Halpert 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition (AFC 1939/005)  
 <<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000011/>>.
- 'Let's Shake It.' Jacksonville Florida, 1939 <<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000004/>> .
- *Mules and Men*. 1935. Harper Collins, 2008.
- 'WPA Field Recordings in Jacksonville.' *1939 Recording Expedition: Herbert Halpert*, Jacksonville Florida, 1939, Florida Memory State Library & Archive of Florida, Florida Folklife Collection <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/238022>>.
- 'To Alan Lomax.', 4 Feb. 1957, American Folklife Center, Alan Lomax Collection (AFC 2004/004) <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2004004.ms230642/?sp=2&r=-0.32,0.078,1.528,0.919,0>>.
- Institute of the Black World, *Education and Black Struggle: notes from the colonized world*. Harvard Educational Review, Monograph series. Harvard University, 1974.
- James, Willis Laurence. 'The Romance of the Negro Folk Cry in America.' *Phylon*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1955, pp. 15–30.
- *Afro-American Music: A Demonstration Recording*. Folkways Records and Asch Recordings, 1970.

- *Stars in de Elements*. Special issue of *Black Sacred Music A Journal of Theomusicology*.  
Duke University Press, 1995.
- Jasanoff, Maya. 'Collectors of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self-Fashioning.'  
*Past and Present*, no.184, pp.109-35.
- Jenkins, Earnestine Lovelle. *Race, Representation & Photography in 19th-Century Memphis: From Slavery to Jim Crow*. Routledge, 2017.
- Johnson, Barbara. 'Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston.'  
*Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1 "Race," Writing, and Difference, 1985, pp. 278–89.
- Johnson, James Weldon. 'preface,' *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals*. Viking Press,  
1926.
- Joint Committee on Folk Arts, 'WPA Folksong Questionnaire.' Works Project  
Administration, 1939, Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonking Migrant Workers  
Collection (AFC 1985/001) <<https://www.loc.gov/item/toddbib000528/>>.
- Jones, Arthur C. *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*. Orbis Books, 1999.
- Jones, Tina. 'Ruby Pickens Tartt: Composing a New Score.' *Alabama Women: Their Lives and Times*, edited by Susan Youngblood Ashmore, Lisa Lindquist Dorr, University of Georgia Press, 2017.
- Joyner, Charles. 'A Region in Harmony: Southern Music and the Sound Track of Freedom.'  
*The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 72, no .1, February, 2006, pp. 3-38.
- Kaplan, Carla. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*. Doubleday, 2002.
- Kelley, Robin. D. G. 'What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?' *The New York Times*, 18 Jun. 2020, section Opinion.  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/opinion/george-floyd-protests-looting.html>>.
- Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Random House, 2017.

- Kennedy, Stetson. 'Florida Folklife and the WPA, an Introduction to A Reference Guide to Florida Folklore from the Federal WPA Deposited in the Florida Folklife Archives.' Florida Division of Historical Resources, Florida Folklife Archives, 1990.  
<[https://www.floridamemory.com/onlineclassroom/zora\\_hurston/documents/stetsonkenedy/](https://www.floridamemory.com/onlineclassroom/zora_hurston/documents/stetsonkenedy/)>.
- Kessi, Shose, Zora Marks and Elelwani Ramugondo 'Decolonizing African Studies.' *Critical African Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2020, pp. 271-82.
- Killian, Lewis M. *White Southerners*. Random House, 1970.
- Krehbiel, Henry Edward. *Afro-American folksongs: a study in racial and national music*. G. Schirmer, 1914.
- Lamon, Lester C. 'The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925.' *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1974, pp. 225-44.
- Langer, Howard. *An Interview with Margaret Mead*. Folkways Records, 1959.
- Lavelle, Kirsten M. *Whitewashing the South: White Memories of Segregation and Civil Rights*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Lepecki, André. 'Decolonizing the Curatorial.' *Theater*, 1 Feb. 2017, vol. 47, no.1, pp. 101–15.
- Lewis, Ronald L. *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980*. University press of Kentucky, 2015.
- Lobel, Michael. 'Iconic Encounter.' *Artforum*, October 2018.  
<https://www.artforum.com/print/201808/michael-lobel-on-gordon-parks-and-ella-watson-76734>
- Lobley, Noel. 'Taking Xhosa Music out of the Fridge and into the Townships.' *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, pp. 181-95.

- Logan, Rayford. *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901*. Dial Press, 1954.
- Lomax, Alan. 'To John W. Work III.' 2 Jan. 1947.
- 'Rainbow Sign.' Manuscripts, Alan Lomax Collection, 1959. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/afc2004004.ms020204/](http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2004004.ms020204/)>.
- Alan Lomax Selected Writings, 1934-1997*, edited by Ronald Cohen, Routledge, 2003.
- Interview by Bruce Nemerov, 1988, John W. Work III collection (copies) - Center for Popular Music, Murfreesboro, TN.
- The Land Where the Blues Began*. The New Press, 1993.
- Lomax, John A. "'Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro.' *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2, April, 1934, pp.177-87.
- Lomax, John ; Lomax, Alan et al. 'Afro-American Blues and Game Songs AFSL4.' Album IV : Afro-American Blues and Game Songs : from the Archive of American Folk Song [5 Disques] 1942. [https://www.loc.gov/folklife/LP/AFS\\_L4\\_sm.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/folklife/LP/AFS_L4_sm.pdf)
- American Ballads and Folk Songs*. 1934. Courier Corporation, 2013.
- Lomax, John A. and Ruby T. Lomax, 'Southern Recording Trip Fieldnotes.' 1939. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000855/](http://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000855/)>.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Lowinger, Kathy. 'Kathy Lowinger on Ella Sheppard and The Jubilee Singers Legacy.' 2016, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXsy7VDj7\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXsy7VDj7_A)>.
- Lubiano, Whaneema, editor. *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*. Pantheon Books, 1997.



- Magnusson, Leifur. 'Housing.' *Monthly Labor Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1920, pp. 215–22.
- Mahar, William J. *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*. University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Maher, Christa. 'Three Pioneering Folk Music Collectors.' *Folklife Center News*, vol. XXII, no. 3, 2000.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Dutton, 1960.
- Maloney, Christopher. 'Fairfield.' *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, 2011.  
<<http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3142>>.
- Marsh, J. B. T. *The Story of the Jubilee Singers With Their Songs*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1883.
- Mason, John Edwin. 'Gordon Park's American Gothic.' *Vantage*, 25 Feb. 2016.  
<https://medium.com/vantage/gordon-parks-american-gothic-af36a14b8b70>
- 'Gordon Parks, Ella Watson, a boy, a bugle, and the American Flag.' *John Edwin Mason: Documentary, Motorsports, Photo History*, 4 Jul. 2017.  
[https://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john\\_edwin\\_mason\\_photogra/2017/07/gordon-parks-ella-watson-a-boy-bugler-and-america.html](https://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/2017/07/gordon-parks-ella-watson-a-boy-bugler-and-america.html)
- McCarthy, Kevin M. *African American Sites in Florida*. Pineapple Press Inc., 2007.
- McGovern, Charles F. 'Real People and the True Folk.' *American Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1990, pp. 478–97.
- McKittrick, Katherine. 'On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place.' *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 12, no. 8, 2011, pp. 947-63.

- Mettler, Suzanne. *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*.  
Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Miller, Karl Hagstrom. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim  
Crow*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Moby, *Play*, 1999, Liner notes.
- Modest, Wayne. *The Art of Being a World Culture Museum: Futures and Lifeways of  
Ethnographic Museums in Contemporary Europe*. Kerber Verlag, 2018.
- Moody-Turner, Shirley. *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*.  
University Press of Mississippi, 2013.
- Moon, Fletcher F., ‘So “Fisk” ticated Ladies and Gentlemen: Highlights From 150 Years of  
Fisk University ’s Musical Tradition, Impact, and Influence. Digital Scholarship @  
Tennessee State University, 2016.
- Moon, Henry Lee. ‘Big Old Lies. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and  
Present*, edited by Henry Lewis Gates Jr. and K. A. Appiah. Amistad Press,  
1993, p. 10.
- Moore , Marvelene C. ‘The Musical Culture of African American Children in Tennessee.’  
The Oxford Handbook of Children's Musical Cultures, edited by Patricia Shehan  
Campbell and Trevor Wiggins Oxford University Press USA, 2012.
- Morrison, Matthew D. ‘Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse.’  
*Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 72, no .3, 2019, pp. 781-823.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

--- ‘Toni Morrison: ‘I’m writing for black people... I don’t have to apologise’’. Interview by Hermione Hoby. *The Guardian*. 24 Apr. 2015.

Moten, Fred and Stefano Harney. ‘The university: last words.’ pp. 1-13.

[https://www.academia.edu/43580248/The\\_university\\_last\\_words\\_fred\\_moten\\_and\\_stefano\\_harney](https://www.academia.edu/43580248/The_university_last_words_fred_moten_and_stefano_harney)

--- ‘WHEN WE ARE APART WE ARE NOT ALONE: A conversation with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney.’ Interview by Zach Ngin, Sara Van Horn & Alex Westfall. *The College Hill Independent*. 1 May, 2020.

--- ‘FUC 012 Fred Moten & Stefano Harney – the university: last words.’ 2020.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqWMejD\\_XU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqWMejD_XU8).

--- *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions, 2013.

Moten, Fred. ‘The Black Outdoors: Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman at Duke University.’

2016 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_tUZ6dybrc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_tUZ6dybrc).

--- *Black and Blur*. Duke University Press, 2017.

--- *In the Break: The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Mullen, Patrick B. *The Man Who Adores the Negro*. University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Murphy, Andrea. ‘The Ethnomusicologist.’ *Pathfinders*, 2008, p.12.

Norell, Robert J. ‘Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama.’ *The Journal of American History*, vol. 73, no .3, 1986, pp. 669–94.

- Olmstead, Molly. 'How Did an Alabama County Just Open Its First Integrated School?' *Slate*, 15 Aug. 2018. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/08/alabama-county-opens-first-integrated-school-in-2018-heres-why-it-took-so-long.html>
- Opperman, Romy. 'We Need Histories of Radical Black Ecology Now.' *Black Perspective*. 3 Aug. 2020. <https://www.aaihs.org/we-need-histories-of-radical-black-ecology-now/#fnref-67415-4>.
- Ottenberg, Simon. 1959. 'Leadership and Change in a Coastal Georgia Negro Community.' *The Phylon Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 7-18.
- Padilioni Jr., James. 'Flavors of Florida : Zora Neale Hurston's Black Folk Ecologies.' *Black Perspectives*, 1 Jul. 2019.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and the Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Patterson, Tiffany Ruby. *Zora Neale Hurston and a history of Southern Life*. Temple University Press, 2005.
- Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. 'Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community.' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 63, no. 6, 1998, pp. 767–84.
- Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell. *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor Determined by the Plantation Régime*. 1918. Read Books Limited, 1996.
- *Life and Labor in the Old South*. 1929. University of South Carolina, 2007.
- Pickens Tarrt, Ruby. 'De Masters Good But the Overseer Mean.' Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 1, Alabama, Aarons-Young. to 1937, 1936. p 64. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/)>.

--- ‘Amy Chapman's Funeral. Livingston, Alabama.’ 1938. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/wpalh000029/](http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh000029/)>.

--- ‘Susanna Ross.’ 1938, manuscript found in the Works Progress Administration Files at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

--- Ruby Pickens Tartt Collection, Julia Tutwiler Library Digital Collection, Livingston, Alabama:

--- RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0012,

--- RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0014.

--- RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0015

--- RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0018

--- RPT\_Box3\_F11\_0021

--- RPT\_Box8\_F3\_0005

--- RPT\_Box8\_F3\_0006

--- RPT\_Box8\_F4\_0006

--- RPT\_Box8\_F5\_0001

--- RPT\_Box11\_FQ4\_0001

Pickens, Therí A. ‘The Verb Is No: Towards a Grammar of Black Women’s Anger.’ *CLA Journal*, vol. 60, no .1, ‘We Were Not Invented Yesterday: ’ Conversation on Being Black Women in the Academy, 2016, 15–31.

Pozzetta, George E. ‘A Padrone Looks at Florida: Labor Recruiting and the Florida East Coast Railway.’ *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 54, vol.1, 1975, pp. 74–84.

Radano, Ronald. ‘The Sound of Racial Feeling.’ *Daedalus*, vol. 142, no. 4, 2013, pp. 126–34.

- Retman, Sonnet. *Real Folks: Race and Genre in the Great Depression*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Ritterhouse, Jennifer Lynn. *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*. University of North Carolina, 2006.
- Roach, Rebecca. *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Robeson, Paul. *Here I Stand*. Beacon Press, 1998.
- Robinson, Randal. *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. Plume Books, 2001.
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. Radio Address From Albany, New York: ‘The “Forgotten Man” Speech.’ Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/288092>
- Rose, Tricia. ‘Loving the Gift and the Gift-Giver.’ Lund-Gill keynote lecture at Dominican University fourth Blues and the Spirit Symposium, 2014.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twck8IKMuHM>
- Ross, Alex. ‘The Rediscovery of Florence Price.’ *The New Yorker*, 29 Jan. 2018.
- Routledge M. Dennis ‘Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and Metaphysics of Race.’ *Journal of Negro Education*, summer 1995, pp. 243-52.
- Schutz, Sally Ann. ‘Grey-Washing Jim Crow: The Cultural Colonization of African-American Folk Music.’ *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, XVII.1, 2019, 12 November, 2019.
- S. Geological Survey. Geographic Names Phase I data compilation (1976-1981). 31 Dec. 1981, Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files. In some instances, from 1:62,500 scale or 1:250,000 scale maps.

- Sensbach, Jon F. 'Culture and Conflict in the Early Black Church: A Moravian Mission Congregation in Antebellum North Carolina.' *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. 71 no .4, 1994, pp. 401–29.
- Shana Almeida, 'Race-Based Epistemologies: The Role of Race and Dominance in Knowledge Production.' *Wagadu*, vol. 13, 2015.
- Sharpe, Christina, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Smith, Shawn Michelle. "'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others": W.E.B. Du Bois's Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition.' *African American Review*, vol. 34, no .4, 2000.
- *American Archives: Gender, Race and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton University Press, 1999.
- *Photography and the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*. Duke University Press, 2004.
- Smith, Thomas Ruys. "'The Mississippi Was a Virgin Field": Reconstructing the River before Mark Twain, 1865-1875.' *Mark Twain Journal*, vol. 53, no. 2, fall 2015, pp. 24-66.
- *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain*. LSU Publishers, 2007.
- Smith, Valerie. 'Black Women's Memories and *The Help*.' *Southern Culture*, vol. 20, no.1, spring, 2014, pp. 26-37.
- Solomon, Olivia and Jack Solomon. *Honey in the Rock: The Ruby Pickens Tartt Collection of Religious Folk Songs from Sumter County, Alabama*. Mercer University Press, 2002.
- Southern, Eileen and Josephine Wright, editors. *African American Traditions in Song, Sermon, Tale, and Dance, 1600s-1920: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature, Collections, and Artworks*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990.
- Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971.

- Spivacke, Harold. 'Letter to Carita Doggett Corse.' American Folklife Center, Carita Doggett Corse Correspondent File <<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000397>>.
- Stanley, Tiffany. 'The Disappearance of a Distinctively Black Way to Mourn.' *The Atlantic*, 26 Jan. 2016.
- Stauffer, John. 'In the Shadow of a Dream: White Abolitionists and Race.' Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, *Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race*, November, 2003.
- Stegall, Joseph F. Extract from '1840 Federal Census Sumter County, Alabama.' Edited and formatted by Maggie Stewart. US Gen Archives website.
- Stewart, Catherine A. *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project*. University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York University Press, 2016.
- Stone, Peter and Ellen Harold. 'Ruby Pickens Tartt.' *Association for Cultural Inequity*.  
<http://www.culturalequity.org/alan-lomax/friends/tartt>.
- Straight, Bilinda. *Women on the Verge of Home*. Suny Press, 2005.
- Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Synnott, Marcia G. 'Julia S. Tutwiler.' *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, 2007.  
<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1112>
- Szwed, John. *The Man Who Recorded the World: A Biography of Alan Lomax*. Random House, 2012.
- Talley, Thomas W. *Negro Folk Rhymes (Wise and Otherwise)*. The Macmillan Company, 1922.



- Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Toward a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Thompson, Katrina Dyonne. *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*. University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Tipton, C. Robert. 'The Fisk Jubilee Singers.' *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1970, pp. 42-8.
- Wade, Stephen *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience*. University of Illinois Press, 2012.
- Walker, Juliet E. K. *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*. University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Wallaschek, Richard. *Primitive Music: An Inquiry Into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races*. 1893. New York: Da Capo Press, 1970.
- Ward, Andrew. *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers, Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000.
- Washington, Booker T. *An Autobiography. The Story of My Life and Work*. 1900. Electronic Edition, 1999.
- *Up from Slavery*, 1901. Penguin Books, 1986.
- Washington, Eric K. *Boss of the Grips: The Life of James H. Williams and the Red Caps of Grand Central Terminal*. Liveright Publishing, 2019.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Vintage Books Random House Inc., 1993.
- Wexler, Laura. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

- White, Shane and Graham J. White. *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech*. Beacon Press, 2005.
- Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Lies That Divides Us*. Penguin Books, 2020.
- Willis, Deborah. 'Ella Watson: The Empowered Woman of Gordon Parks's "American Gothic."' *New York Times*, 14 May, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/14/lens/ella-watson-the-empowered-woman-of-gordon-parks-american-gothic-.html>
- 'Representing the New Negro,' *African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection*, ICP/Steidl, 2005.
- *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, editor. New Press, 1994.
- Wilmore, Gayraud S. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*. Orbis Books, 1983.
- Wilson, Olly. 'Negotiating Blackness in Western Art Music.' *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*, edited by Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonee V. Burnim, Routledge Francis & Taylor Group, 2017, pp. 66-77.
- Wimberly, Lowry Chalres. *Mid Country; Writings from the Heart of America*. University of Nebraska Press, 1945.
- Woods, Clyde Adrian. *Development Arrested: The Blues and the Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. 2nd edn. Verso, 2017.
- Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 1955. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Work II, John W. 'A New American Form.' *Motive*, vol. VI, no. 8, May 1946, p.41-2.
- 'Mrs. Bradford, Ladies and Gentlemen, no date,' Box 10, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

--- 'Negro Folk Song' in *Opportunity*, vol. I, no. 10, October 1923, pp. 292-3.

--- *Folk Song of the American Negro*, Fisk University Press, 1915.

Work III, John W. 'Changing Patterns in Negro Folk Songs.' *Journal of American Folklore*.

Based on a paper delivered at the nineteenth annual Fisk Festival of Music and Art, Nashville, Tennessee, April 29- May 1, 1948. P.138, Box. 4, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

--- *Folk Song Research in the Natchez Area*, n.d. Series I: Correspondence: 1935- 1941, John W. Work III collection (copies) - Center for Popular Music, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

--- 'Introduction to Folklore Program at Fisk University's 75th anniversary celebration', 1941, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

--- 'The Cultural Contribution of Negroes in Tennessee,' n.d. manuscript, p.2. Box 3, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

--- 'Fellowship application of John Wesley Work III' (March 30, 1931), folder 3, box 459, Julius Fund Archives, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin, Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

--- *American Negro Songs*. Crown Publishers, 1940.

--- 'To Jasper A. Atkins.' 26 Nov. 1951. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

- 'To Olive Coleman T. Brown.' 19 Mar. 1952. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 'To Thomas E. Jones.' 10. Feb. 1943. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915- 1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 'To Thomas E. Jones.' 26 Jun. 1940. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 'To Thomas E. Jones.' n.d. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 'To Austin C. Lovelace.' 6 Aug. 1966. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- Letter to Willis Duke Weatherford from the Institute of Humanities, Fisk University, 1 Nov. 1938. Box 1, John Wesley Work III Collection, Papers, 1915-1971, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 'Plantation Meistersinger.' *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1941, pp. 97-106. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/739370](http://www.jstor.org/stable/739370).
- Work, John W III., Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams. *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*, edited by Gordon Robert and Nemerov Bruce, Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.
- Wynter, Sylvia. 'Sambos and Minstrels.' *Social Text*, vol. 1, 1979, pp. 149-56.

### Further bibliography

- Abrahams, Roger, D. *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South*. Penguin, 1993.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. Verso, 2006.
- Broughton, Viv. *Black Gospel: An Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound*. Blandford Press, 1985.
- Browne, Simone, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Carlin, Richard and Bob Carlin. *Southern Exposure: The Story of Southern Music in Pictures and Words*. Billboard Books, 2000.
- Chafe, William H. *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South*. New Press and Lyndhurst Books, 2001.
- Charters, Samuel. *Songs of Sorrow: Lucy McKim Garrison and Slave Songs of the United States*. University Press of Mississippi, 2015.
- Cohen, Ronald D, editor. *Alan Lomax: Assistant in Charge: The Library of Congress Letters, 1935-1945*. University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- *A History of Folk Music Festivals in the United States: Feasts of Musical Celebrations*. Scarecrow Press, 2008.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. 1988. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.

Willis, Deborah. *Early Black Photographers, 1840-1940/23 Postcards*. The New Press, 1985.

--- *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery*, with Barbara Krauthamr. Temple University Press, 2013.

--- *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present*. 2000. W. Norton, 2002.

Doyle, B. W. *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control*. 1937. Kennikat Press, 1968.

Escott, P. D. *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*. North Carolina University Press, 1979.

Evans, David. *Big Road Blues: Tradition & Creativity in the Folk Blues*. 1982. De Capo Press, 1987.

Furlonge, Nicole Brittingham. *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature*. University of Iowa Press, 2018.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis and K. A. Appiah, editors, *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspective Past and Present*. Amistad Press Inc., 1993.

Glover, Staci Simon. *Coal Mining in Jefferson County*. Arcadia Publishing, 2011.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. 1980. Chicago University Press, 2005.

Handy, W. C. *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*. 1941. De Capo Press, 1991.

Herskovitz, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. 1941. Beacon Press, 1967.

Hurston, Zora Neale, *Barracoon, The Story of the Last Slave*. London: HQ, 2018.

- Jacobs-Huey, Lanita. 'The Natives are Gazing and Talking Back: Reviewing the Problematics of Positionality, Voice, and Accountability among "Native" Anthropologists.' *American Anthropologist*, vol. 104, no. 3, 2002, pp. 791–804.
- Jones, Arthur C. *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*. Orbis Books, 1993.
- Jones, Suzanne W. and Sharon Monteith. *South to A New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*. LSU Press, 2002.
- Joos, Vincent. 'The Natchez Fire: A profile of African American remembrance in a small Mississippi town.' doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2011.
- Joyner, Charles. *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*. University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Kawash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*. Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Kelley, Robin. D. G. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. 1977. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Locke, Alain. *The Negro and His Music/ Negro Art: Past and Present*. Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.
- Lovett, Bobby L. *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas*. The University of Arkansas Press, 1999.
- McDannell, Colleen. *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression*. Yale University Press, 2004.

- McDonogh, Gary W. *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers' Project Legacy*. University Press of Mississippi, 1993.
- McPherson, Tara. *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*. Duke University Press, 2003.
- Miller, James S. 'Inventing the "Found" Object: Artifactuality, Folk History, and the Rise of Capitalist Ethnography in 1930s America.' *Journal of American Folklore* vol. 117, no .466, 2004, pp. 373-93.
- Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne. *Viewfinders: Black Women Photographers*. Writers and Readers Limited, 1985.
- Moylan, Virginia Lynn. *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade*. University Press of Florida, 2011.
- Natanson, Nicholas. *The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography*. The University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Park, R. E. *Race and Culture*. Free Press, 1950.
- Perry, Imani. *May We Forever Stand*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- Plant, Deborah G. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2007.
- Platt, Len. *Modernism and Race*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Quan, H.L. T. editor, *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*. Pluto Press, 2019.
- Radano, Ronald Michael and Philip V. Bohlman, editors, *Music and Racial Imagination*. The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Remsberg, Rich. *Hard Luck Blues: Roots Music Photographs from the Great Depression*. University of Illinois Press, 2010.



- Roach, Joseph R. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Samway, Patrick H. and Ben Forkner, editors, *A Modern Southern Reader: Major Stories, Drama, Poetry, Essays, Interviews, and Reminiscences from the Twentieth-Century South*. Peachtree Publishers, 1986.
- Savannah Unit: Georgia Writers' Project, Work Projects Administration. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*. 1940. The University of Georgia Press, 1986.
- Snyder, Jean E. *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Southern, Eileen, editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians*. Greenwood Press, 1982.
- *Readings In Black American Music*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*. Fortress Press, 1990.
- Spillers, Hortense J. *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*. Routledge, 1991.
- Staub, Michael E. *Voices of Persuasion: Politics of Representation in 1930s America*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Stocking Jr., George W. editor, *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of Anthropology, 1883-1911*. 1974. The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Stoller, Ann Laura. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Walker-Hill, Helen. *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music*. University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Williams, Anthony. 'The Keyboard Music of John W. Work III.' Doctoral dissertation, American Conservatory of Music, Chicago, 2006.

*WPA Guide to Florida: The Federal Writers' Project to 1930s Florida*. 1939. Pantheon Books, 1984.