Slave Folklores in American South, an Overview
Morphology, Patterns, Origins, Historical Evolution and Implications of Slaves' Economy, Society and Psychology.

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I. Methodology and Definitions

The study of mythologies and folktales must begin with collection, and then proceed to the categorization of the materials gathered, and only based on these two stages can valuable and reliable theorization and analysis be made.[1] This paper is not engaged in the first phase of this trilogy, but, founding its research on the body of existing literature, will proceed accordingly through the latter two. In order to categorize, it is essential to draw a line between what is studied and what is not, which in this case can be roughly translated into "what is a folklore and what is not". The diction here, referring to the subjects as "folklores" instead of "mythologies" or "literature", is carefully employed, and reflects this paper's approach to understanding the selective texts it will look at. They are essentially spiritual, but not necessarily religious, in that a specifically defined core of faiths or dogmas is not always present; they are not properly established as continuous episodes and may lack the complexity that is often related to the "literature"; they can be so short and ambiguous that the characteristic divinity and supernaturality of myths are not present. They do not necessarily explain, rationalize, justify, or commemorate, and may retain the pure features of human imagination.

Moreover, when we look at how other scholars define the words "folklore" and "mythology", the difference becomes more pronounced. While both are ambiguous and controversially broad, the latter is almost unanimously declared to be either a "story… that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a… phenomenon,"[2] "a glimpse of the ultimate reality,"[3] or narratives that "deal with a supersensuous, preternatural, or 'supernatural' sphere of reality"[4], in a word, a manifestation of imagination that is systematic, self-explanatory, and rational in its own way. On the contrary, the definition for "folklore" includes "the popular-scientific study of [a] country"[5], "a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art",[6] suggesting a less organized nature and a wider scope of materials. For example, while a saying or a joke can rarely make its way into the ranking of myths, they are certainly welcomed in the line of folk culture, and thus folklores.

However, all this is not to say that these texts are "primitive" or deficient in their expression. In fact, a slave folklore proper, as perceived by this paper, is an *institutionalized African imagination*. The foundations of these stories are indisputably African, and preserved a great wealth of such original forms, paradigms, themes and ideals. Nonetheless, the enslaved story-tellers did not just retell the tales as they were. Rather, the lores were *transplanted* to the New World, and underwent significant changes just like a tree moved to foreign soil. They absorbed the more established characteristics of the Anglo-American economic, social, political, and

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[1] Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964), 16.
[2] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* s.v. "Myth," accessed Apr 6, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth.
[3] D. H. Monro, "The Concept of Myth,"*The Sociological Review* 42, no. 1 (1950): 115.
[4] David Bidney, "The Concept of Myth and the Problem of Psychocultural Evolution," *American Anthropologist* 52, no. 1 (1950): 16.
[5] Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore,* trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin, ed. Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 4.
[6] D. Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 331 (1971): 5.

Christian institutions, adapting their folk cultures along such lines. It was a vigorous and lively tradition that was constantly evolving to this day.

So, coming back to the essential question proposed at the beginning, a folklore to be evaluated by this paper is a piece of orally conducted information characteristic to the culture and population in which it originates and circulates. This definition is encompassing enough to take into consideration all tales, proverbs, metaphors, songs and narratives, but necessarily restrictive so that the more tangible, materialistic, or performative aspects of a society, such as the rituals, clothing, architecture and arts, which are all regular concerns of folklorists past and present, are excluded from the picture to ensure strict focus on the language and its literary content, and the folk values reflected therein.

In order to study this topic in depth, in the following sections of this paper I will first offer a generalized dissection of folk texts, identify the units that make up a tale, and then move on to relate some of these "cell" units to their origins both geographically and chronologically. From that point on, by observing similar stories with different plots and details, it becomes feasible to detect the historical trend of development among the folklores, and thus yielding a greater appreciation of how the enslaved communities had responded and reacted to the external pressures and changes.

II. Morphology of Slave Folklores

The anatomy of a folktale is one of the most chaotic section in this discipline, and little is universally agreed upon. In *Morphology of Folktales* alone, the author has identified five different theories of compartmentalizing a tale, among which four employ a three-level approach, building up from an "incident", or an "element", through an "episode" or an "incident", finally organized into a "tale", a "core", a "myth-complex" or a "plot". The exact meanings of them are as confusing as the terminology is varied. While some start at a "minimum recognizable detail", proceed through a combination of such details and reach the final product as "a coherent whole"[7], others prefer to state the smallest component of a tale simply as something "still simpler" than "an expression of a single idea," [8] still unable to resolve the arguments. This paper deems such three-stage-dissemination insufficient for the study of folklores, which can, and often are, essentially *pieces* of information relayed by spoken words. This means of transfer guarantees the wonderful malleability and flexibility of such lores, able to be freely broken down into several units and rearranged at will. Thus, the fundamental unit of a folktale must be smaller than what the aforesaid schemes had allowed, and the "coherent whole" must be divided into stages more than three. Therefore, it is proposed that the slave folklores be consisted of the following four layers:

First, a piece, including single vocabularies, names of persons and locations, dates, descriptive cues and objects, or a unit of knowledge that cannot be further broken down ("rat" or "red" is a piece, while "red rat" is not). Identifying recurring pieces, especially when they show up frequently among folklores from a particular geographic area or a time period, can be very useful in detecting not only their common origin, but also what prompted their emergence and creation.

Second, a detail, usually a combination of several (two or more) pieces ("red rat", for example). Such a level serves as a transformative stage between a piece and an element. A shared detail would be more persuasive in connecting two folklores, but it in itself would not be able to convey any action or logic.

Third, an element, a phrase or a description that incorporates descriptive details or pieces and an action, such as "the priest sang". As the smallest discernible unit that carries a subject and its intention, an element can alone be a folktale, for its length can vary from a phrase up to a detailed depiction of an object, a scene, or a person, as long as it does not involve the essential parts of ---

[7] D. Demetracopoulou and Cora Du Bois, "A Study of Wintu Mythology," *Journal of American Folklore* 45, no. 178 (1932): 382.
[8] Gladys A. Reichard, "Literary Types and Dissemination of Myths," *JAF* 34, no. 133 (1921): 281.

Fourth, a plot, whose major characteristic that distinguishes it from an element is the involvement of one or multiple chronological, logical, or causational sequences. For example, if an action is of concern, it must have an object, a target as well as the executor (such as "the bear saved *the man* from starvation"). A plot in itself can be called a story, and usually a single folklore is constructed entirely around a plot, which can also, in such cases, be titled a theme.

Fifth, a tale, which is the entirety of a folklore. It can be a single plot or a compilation of several. A tale is unique, and no two tales can be exactly identical all the way down to each piece mentioned. However, this term is employed only for its convenience, and actually includes songs and proverbs alike.

III. History and Historiography of Black Folklore Studies

Admittedly, the research into the folklores of African slaves in the United States was not a rarely pondered field, and has produced some voluminous collections and well-respected analyses. Nonetheless, these academic works are little reviewed or synthesized, thus deficient in order and coherence. Here this paper desires to spare some time in filling this gap by providing a brief report of the past and present of the discipline, some conclusions scholars have drawn, and some disagreements that remain unresolved.

The development and growth of Black folklore research can be crudely divided into three waves: the first academic interests of this subject were traced back to the 1860s-80s, roughly around the American Civil War and the Emancipation period, a time when research was largely limited to the mere collection of materials, including the compilation of slave songs,[9] myths,[10] proverbs,[11] anecdotes,[12] sermons,[13] and even children's stories and fables.[14] These admirable works arose out of a shared pity among those white settlers and scholars who marveled at the richness of literary, aesthetic and ethnocultural values slave voices carried, and at the same time wondered why such a field of goldmine had been left "largely untrodden."[15] This is truth indisputable. Before then, despite the publications of travel logs, records of Southern natural history and ethnology, and missionary correspondence, none went beyond simply mentioning the *presence* of a slave folk culture, and most were reluctant to cite specific content. A characteristic of these collections, distinctive from the following eras, was the surprisingly little amount of analysis or theorization that accompanies the texts, and equally little attention to the reasons behind their creation. Moreover, whatever little rationalization there was up to that point always follows a binary model: whether the slave folk songs and tales were "signs of their Happiness, or Contentment in Slavery",[16] or that they were products of misery and their "want to be happy",

[9] W. F. Allen, Ware C. P. and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson, 1867).
[10] Charles Colcott Jones, *Negro Myths from the Georgia Coast* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1888).
[11] J. A. Macon, *Uncle Gabe Tucker: Reflection, Song, and Sentiment* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1883).
[12] John G. Williams, *De Ole Plantation: Elder Coteney's Sermons* (Charleston: Evans and Cogswell, 1895).
[13] William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home* (Boston: A. G. Brown and Co., 1882).
[14] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1880).
[15] Jones, *Negro Myths*, v. In Allen, C. P. and Garrison, the authors make similar remarks, but also hint that the interest of white folks on black "plantation songs" was "extraordinarily" high "thirty years ago (i)", suggesting an even earlier wave of, if not academic or cultural, a purely aesthetic appreciation of the folk culture of the African slaves. The exact nature and history of this specific event remains unclear, but evidence is piling up to investigate the historical development of black spirituals before the Emancipation. See Dena J. Epstein, "Slave Music in the United States Before 1860: A Survey of Sources (Part I)," *Notes* 20, no. 2 (1963), 195-212.
[16] Benjamin Rush, *A Vindication of the Address, To the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America, in Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled "Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture; or a Defence of the West-India Planters from the Aspersions Thrown out Against Them by the Author of the Address."* (Philadelphia: J. Dunlap, 1773), 30.

[17] reflecting the sorrowful reality they suffered. Both assumptions suffered criticism and are currently seen as partial and incomplete.

This tradition of collecting without analyzing persisted throughout the late 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th, but was drawn to a conclusion at mid-1920s, when a second wave of academia gathered momentum and was sustained for the entirety of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, corresponding with the institutionalization and maturation of anthropology as a discipline,[18] and possibly fuelled by the worries and impending urgency that "most of the ex-slaves are dying out and carrying with them a wealth of songs and stories".[19] This period provided still more collections of primary sources. Yet these ventures were less organized by private investigators, but took a more coordinated and "professional" form when institutions such as the American Folklore Society (AFS), South Carolina Folklore Guild[20], governmental agencies[21], and national universities in the North, the Carolinas and Georgia[22]. Alongside this trend we also witnessed genuine wishes and attempts to *categorize, understand, and explain* the African American folklores. Among the new innovations were certain assumptions and conclusions that, for the first time, shed light on the historical, psychological, and social backgrounds of these cultural inventions. The renowned American folklorist John Mason Brewer, for instance, proposed the division of "Negro folklore" into three stages of development: the Slave Period (1619-1865), the "re-adjustment and progress" era (1866-1917), and "the modern epoch" since 1917, and assigned to each an array of folklorish genres. For example, "blues, work songs, superstitions and proverbs" are firmly traced back to the first two, while relatively complicated formats like "social songs… children's rhymes, [and] religious tales" were deemed more susceptible to modern adaptation and change even after the official end of slavery. [23] He went on in another later article to identify rivers, lakes, and coastal areas as the cradles of "Negro folklore", and indicate the Underground Movement as a historically important moment in the literary development of folk culture.[24] This era saw the blossoming of many schools of thoughts regarding the origins and transformations of slave folklores, and among these three achieved relative paramountcy.

The first was that of Franklin Frazier,[25] a theory which I would call "passive", which claims the complete destruction of Africanness in slave folktales during the two-and-a-half-century-long history of enslavement, and asserts the roles of racism and social exclusion in molding the black culture into its present form. It also believes in the blacks' total embracing of the white culture as "a means of organizing and directing their experiences" in constructing identities and shared folk traditions. The second was in direct contrast with the first, and is best illustrated by Herskovits, who finds in black folklores numerous references to an African legacy, and states that the slaves kept what they wanted in their ancestral cultural practices, only drawing from the white customs when necessary to sustain their own survival and thriving.[26] These two

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[17] Theodore Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 13.

[18] See Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen, "Expansion and Institutionalisation," in *A History of Anthropology*, 2nd ed (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 68.

[19] John Mason Brewer, "American Negro Folklore," *Phylon* 6, no. 4 (1945), 355.

[20] John Mason Brewer, *Humorous Folk Tales of the South Carolina Negro* (Orangeburg: The South Carolina Folklore Guild, 1945).

[21] For example, the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal creation under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), has recorded many interviews with former slaves in the American South. See Georgia Writers' Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies of the Georgia Coastal Negro* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1945).

[22] For example, see Howard W. Odum and B. Johnson Guy, *Negro Workaday Songs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), B. A. Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), and Edward C. L. Adams, *Congaree Sketches* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1927).

[23] Brewer, ""American Negro Folklore," 355.

[24] John Mason Brewer, "Negro Folklore in North America," *New Mexico Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1946), 52.

[25] See E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

[26] See Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1941).

theories both owe an intellectual debt to a third one by Brewer, which I would call "psychological" for its stressing the agency and proactive coping of the slaves. It implies that the dependence of slaves gave birth to, instead of destroyed, the first of their folklores, argues that migrations and liberation had the greatest impact on the minds of the Afro-American populations, but remains open on the question whether what existed before was of the African past. This theory further assumes that a change in black folklores must have taken place after emancipation when the former slaves were forced "to look after his own resources and manage his own affairs", taking up a "Reality thinking" which diminished "the care-free, fanciful, almost childish nature" of earlier tales.[27] In sum, the second wave of black folklore studies were diverse and arguably more progressive than before, and developed a more empirical methodology especially concerning the psychoanalysis of their subjects, but failed still to interpret the slave folklores from a perspective beyond servitude and subjugation.

This approach was discredited, then, by the third wave of revisionist historians who began to publish after the Civil Rights Movement and the breakdown of racial segregation in American South. This new generation of scholars took up new duties in the interpretation of salve materials, making multiple attempts to "free" the narratives from the rhetorics of "power imbalance", beginning to question some of the fundamental assumptions on which the previous scholarship was built, and seeking to dismantle the ethnocultural, thus "Eurocentric" studies of the enslaved communities. More importantly, several researchers had taken the content of slave folklores out from their context of slavery, elevating them to the center (or at least the respectable stage) of American literature. Black folk poetry was deemed to best reflect "the tremendous impact of [African-Americans'] presence in America",[28] black folklores become the universal "boiled-down juice of human living,"[29] plays a proactive role in "reconstructing" the African experience and contains elements of truth instead of primitive folly,[30] and the black populations, in general, were less regarded as mere dependents and affiliates to the White culture, without which their society would not have stood.

In conclusion, it is evident that the study of black folklores has undergone significant changes, and was gradually rising in prominence and academic interest, with a progressive diversification of attitudes and approaches. The racism that was once prevalent among collectors and observers was dissipated, more objective and complete records were collected and published, and scholars of more disciplines ranging from music to psychology. It is anticipated that this branch of study would be further facilitated, and indeed it becomes possible that the African American folk cultures still exist and evolve today, and could be used in probing the political, social, and cultural language of the 21st century.

IV. Era of Continuity: 1619-1800

To say that the African slaves brought their ancestors' stories and imaginations entirely to the New Word and continued in the same line of repetition would be gross overgeneralization, but it is true that many, if not most, of the early slave voices retained their African-ness, in form or in content. This paper identifies four most evident commonalities in this era: 1) the use of music and dance as the primary vehicles of communication and commemoration, 2) the disproportionately heavy reference to the natural elements including animals, plants, and climate, 3) the rather monochromic plots and storylines used to construct the tale, and 4) a lack of reference to the white society and their institutions.

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[27] Brewer, "American negro Folklore," 355.
[28] Molefi K. Asante, "Folk poetry in the storytelling tradition," in *Talk that talk,* ed. L. Goss and M. E. Barnes (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 491.
[29] Zora Neale Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, ed. C. A. Wall (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995), 875.
[30] For example, see Tolagbe Ogunleye, "African American Folklore: Its Role in Reconstructing African American History," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 4 (1997), 435-455.

The importance of singing, musical instrument and other vocal expressions among the native African peoples has been widely recognized, including those tribes along the Slave Coast.[31] The most noteworthy types of African music include work/labor rhythms, war songs,[32] collective prayers and religious chants.[33] The musical instruments mostly incorporate drums, bells, rattles and gongs, accompanied by exceptionally melodic tunes and characteristic group performance,[34] features that all found their parallels in the African settlements of the New World. However, unlike the spirituals and hymns that stand as the most illustrious examples of black music traditions, the musical elements of this first era were more crude, less lengthy, of lesser literary complexity, and rested on more realist objectives, which were indeed strengthened by the increased burdens and risks the Africans faced in North America, which forced them to resort to music more often as an avenue for the release of pressure and agony, and to retain their communities under growing threat and changes. For example, in 1680, a missionary in South Carolina observed that local blacks "use their Dances as a means to procure Rain,"[35] exactly corresponding to similar lines of prayers in South Africa, Kenya, and elsewhere on the continent.[36] Furthermore, most of the early African American poetry from this era was also musical, harkening back to the African customs, such as the epics or praises sung among the Ashanti-speaking peoples in Ghana. An account in 1774 mentioned similar "rude and uncultivated" poetry in Maryland,[37] reflecting an institutionalized, natural fashion.

The musical instruments of the New World were preserved with more care. Other than the famous banjo, the 17th and 18th century African slaves played quaqua, gudugudu, and other drum-like instruments of African, especially Yoruba, origins.[38] More importantly, these musical poetry and chantings were mostly performed in large, African-styled bands "with dancing", in pidgin, or even native African, tongues, explaining the inability of contemporary Western travelers to record their lyrics.

The prevalence of music in early slave societies penetrated all aspects of life, and indeed became the nearly dictating pipeline through which knowledge and stories were transmitted, thus came the conviction that they "sang all kinds of songs at all times," at festivities, in daily lives, and between or within households.[39] This paper proposes that this dependence on the music also suggested the unstable familial and communal ties, in that story-telling in a more established and pondered form must be the product and luxury of a sedentary and relatively leisurely life, which permits the presence of "free time", uninterrrupted conversations, and the solidification of a basic story structure. In the 17th and 18th century, when the international slave trade was still legal, working conditions harsh (as individual slaves could be easily replaced), and interpersonal ties insecured, it is reasonable that music gained its popularity, for it can be heard over long distances, sung and listened to at any time (even at work), and more easily memorized and required little processing or active creation: more of an intuition.

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[31] Karlton E. Hester, "Traditional African Music," *Living Encyclopedia of Global African Music* (2003), http://artsites. ucsc.edu/igama/2%20-%20Encyclopedia/e-LEGAM%20Content%20Files/C%20-%20FAAISCJ/01_Chapter1.pdf.

[32] For example, see Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1975), 89.

[33] Laura C. Boulton, *African Music* (Chicago: Field Museum of National History, 1939), 3.

[34] Nnamani Sunday Nnamani, "The Role of Folk Music in Traditional African Society: The Igbo Experience," *Journal of Modern Education Review* 4, no. 4 (2014), 305.

[35] Morgan Godwin, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate, Suing for Their Admission into the Church: or A Persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negro's* [sic] *and Indians in our Plantations…* (London: F. D., 1680), 33.

[36] For example, see John Kessler, "Prayer in the religious traditions of Africa, I," *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco: Baylor university Press, 2013), 65-76.

[37] Nicholas Cresswell, *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777* (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), 17-19.

[38] For example, see Nina Fletcher Little, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection; A Descriptive Catalogue*.

[39] See Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History.*

The nature also played a vital part in the early slave folklores. Though actual texts were lacking concerning this era's slave folklores, the begging for rain and good harvests was only one among the muc circumferential evidence. White ministers complaint constantly about the "idolatrous songs" and other "superstitions" practiced by the slaves,[40] which may have well implied the animistic features of traditional African religions and faiths. For example, there were many African songs and poems devoted to the River, the Animals, the Plants, or even the Serpent which would have aroused the justifiable hatred from the Christian practitioners of the colony. Such express idolatry declined gradually with the preaching and education of white missionaries, but residues of this fondness to nature remained. In *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns* (1801), Richard Allen, the famous African American bishop, compiled works of his own and other earlier ministers specifically for the use of black congregations. In this collection, "river" and other water sources are mentioned peculiarly often. Vivid visual descriptions were as follows:

> "He is their shield and hiding place/A covert from the wind,
> A fountain in the wilderness/Throughout the weary land.
> The chrystal streams run down from heav'n…"[41]

Such water-related analogies were also found in phrases like "goodness running like a stream,"[42] "death, like a narrow sea," and "everlasting spring abides/and never-withering flowers."[43] These lyrics were written by white clergymen, but them being selected to appeal to the black believers still showed the importance natural scenes assumed in the mind of enslaved Africans. The use of animals as characters or vehicles in analogy in storytelling was also popular across time periods, demonstrating the amazing sustainability of nature in the African American literature.

This focus on nature was authentic to Africa. There were animal-related proverbs in multiple West African states including Liberia,[44] stories in which animals serve as protagonists[45] and/or nature proactive agents in assisting or obstructing human wishes. This emphasis can be explained by the vitality of nature in traditional African economies of hunting, gathering, as well as small-scaled agriculture. In America, the industrial development during colonial times was of little use to the enslaved populations, and expansion in agricultural ventures did not change the method of plowing, seeding, and harvesting, all of which had to be done manually and their yields reliant on natural forces. This dependence made nature a primary concern among the blacks, who incorporated this fear and hope into their folk culture.

The simplicity of such early folkloric works are also noted, in that each prayer was to be targeted at one clearly identified goal, and the religious songs relied little on abstraction or symbolism without reference to everyday life. This was *not* a continuity of the African past in the traditional sense, since on that continent we see the exact opposite: long epics, mythologies with arrays of personalities and various plot twists, and even pantheons of deities that would remind one of the famous mythological systems in Ancient Greece or Scandinavia.[46] However, this discontinuity, a lack of African influence, was still a faucet of the continuous transition of this era. The explanation to this change was psychological and social. In order for a comprehensive mythological tradition to exist and develop, a society must be specialized, and a portion of the

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[40] For example, see Alexander Hewatt, *Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London: A. Donaldson, 1779), 100-103.
[41] John Leland, "The glorious day is drawing nigh," *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns* ed. Richard Allen (Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1801), #5.
[42] John Leland, "Come and taste, along with me," *Ibid*, #6.
[43] Isaac Watts, "There is a land of pure delight," *Ibid*, #27.
[44] For example, see Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore*, 88-89.
[45] For example, see "Spider Deals with the Famine," *Ibid*, 62-65.
[46] For example, in the Kingdom of Dahomey there exists a list of gods and goddesses. See, for example, "Dramatis Personae," *Ibid,* 159-160. Excerpts of epics and other tales can also be found in the same book.

population must be free from the agricultural bondage to engage in intellectual, religious, or complex creative endeavors. This mental freedom, however, was a luxury to the entire black population in the American South, whose monochromic and routinely life simply did not allow time or energy to be invested in folk cultures beyond the composition of musical tunes or recitation of religious songs. As more and more slaves became literate, received education and training to perform diversified and specialized skills and developed institutions of their own, the original complexity returned in the 1800s, even though it never again reached the elaborateness seen in Africa, and never gave birth to any authentic superstructure.

African-American folklores of this era is relatively isolated from the white culture in which they existed, and this paper argues that their mentalities and beliefs may not even be entitled "African American", but still African by all means. The false impression that the enslaved Africans had, on a large scale, taken up the Christian faith and abandoned their original way of life before 1800s was an illusion resulting from the good publicity received by missionaries like Samuel Davies, who proclaimed with confidence that "the [Christian] Psalms and Hymns [have] enabled [the slaves] to gratify their peculiar taste for Psalmody."[47] Nonetheless, these conversions were limited in number and scale before 1800s, thus failed to touch the life of most enslaved populations. Therefore, the simple formats and plots of their folklores in this period rarely included the social structures between the whites and the blacks, the clergy, the government, the urban or industrial developments, the commercial transactions, or the technological innovations, all of which would occupy their own niches in stories from latter dates.

V. Era of Adaptation and Adjustation: 1800-1885

In 19th century, as the transatlantic African slave trade was abolished (in 1807-8), the enslaved population of the United States must grow on its own.[48] This legislation profoundly altered the life of the enslaved Africans in the South: with the major source of labor severed, the slave owners must ensure that the slaves were self-sustainable, and became more lenient on treating their slaves, out of fear that any desertion, mutiny, escape or untimely death would pose a more threatening immediate and long-term financial loss than they had once been. Since the implementation of this aforementioned Act, the slaves finally began to be given the space and the silent permission to build a civil society of their own, with stabler social ties and roles. Other than that, the proliferation of Christianity among the slaves, a process that had started since 1776,[49] has finally reached a considerable level by 1800. Around the same time, blacks also began to enter the rank of clergymen and social organizers: by 1800s there had emerged a noteworthy number of free blacks in the United States with their own social structures,[50] the Free African Society was established in 1788,[51] and Richard Allen was made a deacon in 1797, then a bishop in 1816.[52] All these forces combined duly altered the slaves' folk culture, and visible changes in content can be seen in the following four aspects: 1) absorption of white cultural and religious elements, 2) a rise in folkloric complexity, in that these stories more often referred

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[47] Rev. Samuel Davies, *Letters from the Rev. Samuel Davies, shewing the State of Religion in Virginia, particularly among the Negroes* 2nd ed. (London: R. Pardon, 1762), 16.

[48] *Act of 1807, An Act to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight* (Ninth Congress of the United States, 1807). Accessed from http://legisworks.org/congress/9/session-2/chap-22.pdf.

[49] That was, according to John W. Cromwell, when "the first regular [black] church organization" was established in the United States, at Williamsburg, VA. See John W. Cromwell, "The Earlier Churches and Preachers," *The Negro Church* ed. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1903), 30.

[50] For example, the population of free blacks in 1800 reached 100,000. See Erin Bradford, "Free African American Population in the U.S.: 1790-1860" (University of Virginia Library, Geostat Historical Census Browser, 2008), accessed from https://www.ncpedia.org/sites/default/files/census_stats_1790-1860.pdf.

[51] Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1921), 92-93.

[52] Cromwell, "The Earlier Churches and Preachers," 31.

to institutions such as churches, governmental agencies or social groups, 3) greater intellectual autonomy, best demonstrated by their independent poetry and their express rejection to the system of slavery through oral traditions, and 4) the beginning of literary diversification and codification.

The assimilation of (or into) the white norms mostly likely began among the Christened slaves and their immediate contacts, to whom the evangelical religions proved a great attraction.[53] In this era, the once ambiguous images of a Christianized world-view crystallized, and distinct Christian terminologies were used. In 1830, a slave tune recorded in Charleston sang "Old Satan, come before my face/To pull my kingdom down/Jesus come before my face/to put my kingdom up,"[54] explicitly employed the religious duality characteristic to the Abrahamic faiths, but deficient in the vague distinction between the concepts of good and evil among native African tribes. Emergence of the phrase "Massa (Master) Jesus" was another peculiar example text that borrowed from the strict social hierarchy ever-present on plantations. The sheer amount of white-styled sermons and songs collected during this era stood as further proof in themselves.[55] In fact, white religion has been so impactful that some enslaved Africans reported "visions" of "Lord and Master… four leely angel, wuh dress een wite an hab wing on eh back" at night, and became convinced that this curiosity served as indisputable omens of his certain ascension into heaven after death.[56]

Sometimes the stories themselves talked about the interactions between the two peoples, such as slaves taking up specialized, technical occupations, learning tricks from the whites, or having informed conversation with their masters or "racial superiors." A story in 1850s recorded a black tell such words:

> "...On one occasion a strolling Yankee dentist visited the neighborhood. For the first time Jack [the slave] beheld sundry appliances which modern ingenuity had devised for the facile extraction of teeth. In his old methods he at once lost confidence. Application was made to his master for the immediate purchase of certain designated lancets, and for pairs of forceps, both straight and curved. His wish was gratified…"[57]

The story went on to describe a comical event in which John embarrassed himself by failing a surgery, but the success or failure of the character can scarcely be evidence to the folkloric value of this piece. What is of importance is the admittance of profession into the oral culture, just as the acceptance of it by the black communities in reality. Other than professionals, the blacks also ventured into pondering the law, the politics, the morals, and the white customs. John A. Macon, creating the famous "Uncle Gabe Tucker" personality to which he attributed arrays of black proverbs, discussions, thoughts and beliefs, provided ample support on these matters. In his collection, the blacks describe the American legal system as a chaotic, sometimes self-contradictory one, "jes' like po'in 'lasses an' vinegar an' water out de same jug,"[58] while the absurd obsession of some white slaveholders to run for office was ridiculed by the story about a man who "nebber was satisfied tell he got 'elected mayer ob a little cross-roads village dat didn' hab nuffin' to brag on…"[59]

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[53] Dena J. Epstein, "Slave Music in the United States before 1860: A Survey of Sources (Part I)," *Notes* 20, no. 2 (1963), 202.

[54] Peter Neilson, *Recollections of a Six Years' Residence in the United States...* (Glasgow: D. Robertson, 1830), 258-9.

[55] For example, see William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson, 1867) and Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1880).

[56] "Daddy Jupiter's Vision," *Negro Myth from the Georgia Coast, Told in the Vernacular* ed. Charles C. Jones (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, printed by H. O. Houghton & Co., 1888), 158-166.

[57] "Dentistry at the Old Plantation Home," *Ibid,* 139.

[58] J. A. Macon, "On Law-Books," *Uncle Gabe Tucker; or, Reflection, Song, and Sentiment in the Quarters* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1883), 19.

[59] *Ibid,* "Running for Office," 44.

Comments on these white-monopolized disciplines must have required both certain engagement or knowledge about them, and a comfort to make fun of, sometimes even to criticize, such "white mens' folly", something that could only take place in minds that were relatively less threatened by external forces *and* in frequent contact with others, factors absent among the blacks until after the 1800s.

The slave folklores were also becoming more complex, lengthy, with the addition of narrative devices, plot twists, and the format of re-telling, in that the narrator is not the actual person who had experienced a novelty or engages in an activity. This complexity was also signaled by the explanatory nature of certain new folklores, when natural phenomenon or illusions were used to justify a guess or a social tradition. Sometimes even the simple attempt to rationalize some white men's novel items (laws, courts, or dancing balls, for example) showcased an intellectual discourse unseen before. Even in the realm of music, the emerging coordination of chorus and dance in religious and labor songs, as untrained as some were, demonstrated some acquisition of musical knowledge from the white churchgoers and hymn singers.[60]

The growing complexity was accompanied by rising autonomy. This autonomy was expressed in two ways, first by the trials of blacks to venture into the literary establishment of poetry, political treatise and novels, all of which were cultural genres once dominated by white writers, and second by the emphasis of "flight", "return", native-ness, and other similar themes which suggested a deep rejection to their servitude, subjugation and a yearning for changes in the racist South. The former prompt was exemplified first and foremost by slave narratives that incited public debate, such as those by Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, which "reveal the struggles of people of color" "increasingly in the 1840s and 1850s."[61] Other than these works, the poems of "colored bards" such as George Moses Horton began to explore and imitate topics and inspirations other than the conventional ones. In Horton's collection there was little concern of slavery, suffering or hardships, but spent much efforts praising nature:

"Sweet on the house top falls the gentle shower,
When jet black darkness crowns the silent hour,
When shrill the owlet pours her hollow tone,
Like some lost child sequester'd and alone…"[62]

This romantic fashion must not be equated to the primitive natural tales of Africa, as they required education, training and the leisure ro pursue such a path. Though its seeming "assimilation" into the white culture may be perceived as a betrayal or a loss of independence, this paper argues otherwise: in order to counter the predominant cultural scene, the blacks must first gain recognition and accumulate powers political, social, and *intellectual*, the last of which was vital for its potential to influence the populace. And what could gain more acceptance and respect than to take up the already-respectable Western literary trend? The themes of escape, the second feature, were evident in both songs and tales. In "the Old Ship of Zion", for example, the life of a slave is depicted as a "reelin' an' a rockin'" ship, and continues:

"Well the ole worl' is a rollin', rollin', rollin',
Yes, the ole worl' is rollin', rollin' away.
Well ain't you goin' to get ready?
Yes, ain't you goin' to get ready? For it's rollin' away.
Well get on board little children, children, children,

[60] See William Francis Allen et al., vii.
[61] William L. Andrews, "An Introduction to the Slave Narratives" (University of North Carolina, Documenting the American South), accessed on May 1st, 2019 from https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html.
[62] George Moses Horton, "Meditation on a Cold, Dark, and Rainy Night," *The Poetical Works of George M. Horton, the Colored Bard of North Carolina* (Hillsborough: D. Heartt, 1845), 36.

Well get on board, for this ole worl's rollin' away."[63]

In this piece, the slaves exploited the Christian language (of Zion) to discredit the very social structure supported by this religious faith, and the metaphor of a ship suggested a clear wish of returning, also borrowing from a collective conscious of the transatlantic travel in slave ships that reminded readers of the native land from where they were brutally seized. Escape was more explicit a part of African American poetry in the "Long John" series that sang "...like a turkey through the corn. He's long gone"[64] and in the more peculiar type of folklores which talked about individual or groups of slaves or to-be slaves employing the magical power of flight to return to Africa. These tales also presented a greater sense of communal grievance instead of the typical African individualistic folk stories featuring lone heroes and their epic sagas, as the protagonist shaman "teaches the earthbound slaves to fly… and return to Africa *together*."[65] This may have been a result of the continual development of the stable slave society constructed upon familial ties and plantation households, so that no slave viewed herself as a displaced person without support, but a member of a self-contained community sharing common interests, a historical force that cannot be ignored not only in the study of black folklores, but also that of black society and psychology.

The diversification and codification of slave folk culture also began in this stage. The former is obviously supported by the many genres of literature discussed earlier, but the latter was a more subtle and less noticed phenomenon. The "codification" was the emergence of certain paradigms, certain structures that began to be followed by most black writers or story-tellers. These may have helped formalize and maturize the entire black literature as a subject, but on the other hand also constrained the free imagination witnessed in earlier years. The slave narratives followed identical formats from slavery to escape, and then comparison between the South and the North and also that between the North ideal and the North reality, a format that would best convey their message to the white audience. Slave songs appeared to possess two such formats: one to depict the "good" of plantation life, usually expressed through the description of charming scenery and affection between African laborers, and the other the "bad" of slavery as seen in the lamentations to the past, wishes of withdrawal, or religious self-comforting. Arguably both lines of folk culture showcased black solidarity and endurance, but they were after all songs and lyrics with intentional messages coded within (as the labor songs were sometimes used to communicate information in a way no whites could understand), and the more trivial or implication-free aspects of the slave folk culture were lost.

However, despite such evolution, the black folklores in this era retained certain important features from the previous centuries. The labor tunes went largely unchanged, preserving the "rather monotonous" but rhythmic melodies as heard in the 1808 South Carolina song "We are going down to Georgia, boys/To see the pretty girls, boys."[66] Similarly, the animistic tendency and the focus on animals were never fully eradicated. In mid-19th century slave proverbs, fables and tales alligators, wolves, rabbits and bears continued to serve as common symbols,[67] and rivers still go on "to cry 'fire'."[68]

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[63] Howard W. Odum, "Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes," *The American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* 3 (1909), 265-365.

[64] Daryl Cumber Dance, "'He's Long Gone': The Theme of Escape in Black Folklore and Literature," *The African American Literary Revival* (University of Richmond, 1992), 546, accessed on May 1st, 2019 from https://scholarship.
richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1153&context=english-faculty-publications.

[65] Gay Wilentz, "If You Surrender to the Air: Folk Legends of Flight and Resistance in African American Literature," *MELUS* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1989-Spring, 1990), 23.

[66] John Lambert, *Travels Through Canada and the United States of North America in the Years 1806, 1807 and 1808* vol. 2 (London: C. Cradock & W. Joy, 1814), 253-254.

[67] *Negro Myth from the Georgia Coast*, vii-x.

[68] Odum, "Religious Folk-Songs," 315.

VI. Era of Diversification and Formalization: 1885-1914

This era started first in the aftermath of the Emancipation, but as the culture of white superiority and the remnants of economic and *de facto* slavery persisted in the South until much later (some may say to this day), this paper puts the beginning of this stage in 1885, eight years after the last Union troops withdrew from the Southern States when the prospects of former slaves have improved, and receives more sympathy as well as academic attention. This era saw more changes of African American literature in form rather than in content, which continued its pre-Emancipation course.

The transition in form is the continual growth in the diversity of black literature, especially its admission into the ranks of "formal" literary works, being massively printed and distributed. The publication of slave tales as children's literature or entertainment peaked in this stage, such as the proliferation of Brer Rabbit, the Tar Baby,[69] and other animals whose roles transformed from the embodiments of virtues or human qualities, or the simple reference to nature, to the humorous characters filled with human emotions and behavior. Such publications continued into the 1910s and 1920s, and stopped around the same time, when the Wars and domestic instability shifted the African American attention to the more realistic struggle for political, economical and social equality, thus abandoning the public showcase of their folkloric cultures.

VII. Conclusion

After the 1920s, arguably the genuine, authentic "slave folklores" have ceased to exist other than in records and memories of the past, and were finally replaced by a resistant and revisionist African American narrative in the 1950s and 1960s. As this paper has shown in details, the development of the slave folk culture was determined by crucial historical changes in law, politics, economy and social structure, which had significant implications to the black mentality and reality. It is also proved that black folklore, throughout its existence, had always sought to find its way into becoming a complete and self-sustaining line of literature, to create a language of resistance, vitality, and one that can relate back to the homeland, which was capable of tying them into one single community and collective body.

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[69] For example, see John M. McBryde Jr., "Brer Rabbit in the Folk-Tales of the Negro and Other Races," *The Sewanee Review* 19, no. 2 (April, 1911), 185-206.