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To Know The Soul Of the People: The Field Study of the "Folk Negro" and The Making of Popular Religion in Modern America, 1924-1945

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By:
Jamil W. Drake
Th.M., Emory University, 2010
M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

To Know the Soul of the People: The Field Study of the "Folk Negro" and the Making of Popular Religion in Modern America, 1924-1945

By: Jamil W. Drake

To Know the Soul of the People provides an intellectual history of the study of race and religion in the developing social sciences and folk studies of early twentieth-century North America. It chronicles how the study of African American religions coalesced around social scientists and federal specialists' engagement in the political discussion about the future of the "Folk Negro" --- African Americans who were typically low-income workers, inmates, semi-skilled and unskilled laborers. At the heart of my project is the notion that religious expressions of the "Folk Negro" became important scientific data to understand the unique behavioral traits that were purportedly in contradiction to the progressive ideals of modern America.

The contemporary field of African American Religions has often used the term "folk" to capture a set of vernacular expressions and indigenous practices that characterized the lived or popular religions of southern African American communities apart from liberal Protestantism. Rarely has there been any attention to the actual social scientists and federal specialists who helped frame how we characterize the "Folk Negro" and their seemingly unorthodox and ecstatic forms of religious expressions in the everyday context of prayer meetings, revivals, cotton fields, labor camps and domiciles. *To Know the Soul of the People* takes up this neglected task by critically investigating the field works of Howard Odum, Charles S. Johnson, Zora Hurston, Alan Lomax and their institutional-affiliations (e.g. UNC-Chapel Hill, Fisk University, Columbia University and the Library of Congress). My research shows that a conglomerate of scientific and professional experts in these academic, philanthropic and governmental institutions helped to shape the way in which the field discusses southern and lower-class religious cultures in twentieth-century America.

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There is an old aphorism that "none of us get where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps." My research project is a testament to this aphorism. I attribute the completion of this research project to the countless individuals who have supported me. I want to first pay tribute to my mother, Regina Drake. Your love, sacrifice and labor gave me the necessary tools to accomplish this task. In fact, I only accomplished this task because I am your son. I will never forget our many thought-provoking conversations at the kitchen table or on the living room couch, the many late-night hours that you labored at jobs, and your own faith that empowered you to mold me into the person I am today. I only hope to model your strength, perseverance and grace (and writing ability too!). You see, the plays, musicals, and reading sessions that I dreaded as a young boy finally paid off! I also want to thank the smartest man I know, my grandfather, William "Big Daddy" Harris. It was your labor in the meat industry in Chicago that created the conditions for me to pursue higher education. Daily, I aspire to be the loving man to my children that you are to your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. To my grandmother, Jean Shaw, your love, tear-jerking humor, brutal honesty and sheer confidence always helped give me perspective to weather difficult times. I want to thank Michael and Mark Gumm for their continued love and support. My gratitude is also extended to Yolanda and Donna Holt as well as to Matthew Sr. Danube, Matthew Jr., Selah, and Nile Johnson. To my mother-in-law, Arnetta "Ya-Ya," Johnson, thank you for your many prayers and warm spirit.

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Callaway, Starbucks, or the Woodruff Library that spurred me to thinking about the significance of the "folk" category in African American religious and political life. You always pushed me to keep writing and stay the course. I also want to thank Dianne Stewart, Lawrence Jackson, Carol Anderson, and the late Rudolph Byrd for their intellectual rigor, dedication, and support over the years at Emory University. This project partly grew out of the exciting and intense debates in Dianne Stewart's graduate seminars on African and African American religions. I also want to thank other Emory faculty for supporting me: Michael Rich, James Hoesterey, Karen Stolley, Sara McClintook, and Thee Smith. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the staff who contributed to my success at Emory University: Jerrold Brantley, Stephanie William Dennis, Toni Avery, Andy Boyles, Martha Shockey, Rhonda Thompson, Nichelle Fyre, Bevin Carpenter, John Brown, Nathaniel Smith, Ozzie Harris, Myron McGee, and Kymberly Dent. Finally, I thank all my brilliant colleagues in the Laney Graduate School, Graduate Division of Religion and American Religious Cultures at Emory in particular.

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Introduction

"The Revival of the Folk-Concept in African American Religion"

In April of 2007, Oxford University Press celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of cultural historian Lawrence W. Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.[1] Originally published in 1977, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* highlighted how African Americans "forged and nurtured a culture" from slavery to World War II. Levine was part of a larger intellectual trend in the field of African American history intent on displaying how blacks "formed and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized their children, built a religion, and created a rich expressive culture."[2] This cultural turn in African American history was a direct response to the literature that Levine felt reduced blacks to pawns at the whim of unjust social and economic conditions not of their own choosing. By the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists, in particular, were invested in describing the ways in which the legacy of racism arrested the development of blacks and consequently propelled them in a perpetual cycle of "degradation and pathology" in post-World War II urban America.[3] To bolster his claim that blacks actively "forged and nurtured a culture," Levine interestingly revived the folk category by investigating the vernacular culture of the "black folk." His attention to the lore of the "black folk" was part of his life-long mission to steer American history away from its

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[1] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

[2] Ibid, xxv

[3] During the 50s and 60s, social scientists and historians were preoccupied with explaining the impact of race on the "damaged psyche" or pathologies of urban blacks in particular. Such social scientists and urban historians laid the groundwork for liberal reform and programs such as the Great Society. These social scientists ranged from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Kenneth B. Clark, Mamie P. Clark, Abram Kardiner, Lionel Ovesey, and Nathan Glazer. At the time of the 1960s, there was the rise of urban history, especially during the race riots.

provincial preoccupation with the "movers and shakers" [and] towards the "masses of [human kind]."[4] Similar to contemporary historians Sterling Stuckey and Eugene Genovese, Levine felt that a thorough investigation of oral expressions provided insight into the attitudes, values and worldviews of the "black folk."[5] Levine noted that the "[black] folk [were not] "inarticulate intellectual ciphers, as objects who were continually acted upon by forces over which they had no control, and to recognize them as actors in their own right who not only responded to situation but often affected it in crucial ways."[6]

Religion was at the heart of how the black folk forged and nurtured their unique consciousness and culture in American history. Against historian Stanley Elkins' "Sambo thesis," Levine felt that the folk religious cultures emerged out of the thoughts and expressions of African slaves in the antebellum south.[7] In this sense, he argued that the folk category in religious vernacular culture displayed a "sacred world-view" that enslaved Africans transported from West Africa and amalgamated with other Euro-American cultural forms in antebellum South.[8] The African-inspired pentatonic scale, antiphonal character, improvisational quality, bodily movements, and communal participation constituted the forms of the folk spirituals and lined hymns. In addition to the structure of expressions, drawing on religious historian Mircea Eliade's view of sacred reality in archaic societies, Levine noted that folk religious beliefs and expressions

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[4] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* xxiv

[5] Sterling Stuckey, "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery," *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), 417-437; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976)

[6] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, xxv

[7] Elkins compared American slavery to the concentration camps and argued that it reduced blacks mentality to a child-like disposition. Slavery arrested the development of blacks. Elkins, *Slavery; a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959)

[8] Levine states that the magic and superstition of whites made it easier for blacks to preserve their African spirituality.

demonstrated how slaves consciously created alternative modes of spatiality and temporality that allowed them to dwell on a transcended spiritual plane and commune with the gods and mythical ancestors of the past.[9] The sacred world-view was neither escapist nor compensatory. Rather, it instilled "meaningful forms of personal integration, attainment of status, and individual worth" in the face of American slavery.[10] Levine's attention to the sacred world in which the "slaves created beyond the slave master" was part of, what historian Earl Lewis dubbed, the "near total autonomists" in field of African American history in the late 1960s and 1970s.[11]

Most importantly, Levine extended his study of African American folklore to the twentieth century. Although emancipation significantly altered African American religious consciousness and expression, Levine argued that a residue of the folk and southern religious culture persisted in the twentieth century. While emancipation and industrialization segmented the so-called homogeneity of black culture, he argued that a folk and southern "regeneration" of religious beliefs and expressions--- ecstasy, shouting, improvisational singing, supernatural beliefs and practices----continued among certain blacks in "more isolated rural sections of the South [and] in northern urban centers as well." He stated, "[f]reedom may have dissolved the homogeneity of slave [folk] culture,

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9 Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*: *The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1987).

10 Levine challenges idea that slaves were docile and did not resist or oppose the slavery. This idea, according to Levine, presumes a modern view of the political. Instead, the slaves' creation of a sacred universe through expressions and practices was a form of spiritual and psychological resistance. Here, Levine resembles Albert Rabateau view of spiritual resistance. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 54. For more on religious/spiritual "agency" of the slaves, see Albert Rabateau, *Slave Religion*: *The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). 290-318.

11 Earl Lewis, "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas," *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 100, No. 3 (Jun., 1995), 772. The near total autonomists included Sterling Stuckey, George Rawick, John Blassingame, Lesile Owens, and Herbert Gutman.

but it did not completely dissolve that culture itself."[12] According to Levine, the continuity of the folk religious tradition existed among the black southern and working populations inhabiting "isolated" rural churches and urban storefronts. For instance, rural Baptist and Methodist churches and urban Holiness and Pentecostal storefronts all maintained the "traditional trappings" of folk and southern culture such as "spiritual possession, shouting, the chanted sermons, the feeling of familiarity with God…communal setting in which songs were created and recreated."[13] Although Levine noted that gospel music was compositional, individualistic and future-oriented, he also argued that it still contained similar improvisational, syncopated and emotional styles like the antebellum spirituals. He highlighted that the Holiness and Spiritualist churches functioned as a springboard for the revitalization of the folk and southern religious tradition through rituals of "healing, prophecy, spirit possession and the religious dance."[14] The folk category was reserved for the religious beliefs and expressions of black southern and working populations in the twentieth century.

To be sure, Levine was not alone in reviving the folk category in order to capture African American religious beliefs and vernacular expressions in the twentieth century. The folk category has held a prominent place in locating the impact of the "rural," "southern," and " lower and working class," expressions and customs in the study of African American religion. Southern historian Charles Reagan Wilson asserted, "Folk religion encompasses the religious beliefs and practices of social groups outside the power structure." These social groups, according to Wilson, were "low-income groups"

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[12] Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 152
[13] Ibid, 158
[14] Ibid, 180

and the "politically disenfranchised."[15] As demonstrated in Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, the "folk" category's attention to the religious cultures of southern and working-class African Americans emphasized agency over historical victimization in the face of de jure and de facto racial segregation. The folk category was the precursor to the search for "popular religion(s)" in the field of American religion.

Contemporary religious scholars have applied the folk category to highlight the spiritual beliefs and vernacular expressions of southern black populations in comparison to "doctrinal churches" or "mainline" Protestant denominations of the middle or bourgeoisie class. The folk category has operated to shed more light on the variety of black religious expressions that might not easily fit into the political protest narrative that standardized the so-called "Negro or Black Church." In her book entitled, *Black Magic,* contemporary religious historian Yvonne Chireau highlighted the "black folk tradition" and captured the vibrant and non-institutional supernatural practices (e.g. conjure and magic) of black southerners after emancipation. She argues that the black folk tradition actually disrupted the reduction of religion to "formal creeds, doctrines, and theologies of a church-based faith tradition."[16] Folk enabled her to identify the spiritual rituals such as healing and harming practices in black communities. Other scholars of African American religions have used the folk category to discuss the ways in which southern migrants and working-class populations shaped modern religious and commercial culture after World

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[15] Charles Reagan, "Folk Religion," *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 322.

[16] Yvonne Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4. At the heart of Chireau's thesis is that black folk tradition (conjure and magic practices) exploit the false the binaries between magic and religion; non-Christianity and Christianity. My project on the ethnographers and fieldworkers documenting the folk expressions and customs of black southern and working-class populations is indebted to her chapter on the Hampton Folklore Society, 121-149.

War I. These scholars show how the "southern diaspora" contributed to the formation of modern religion. In *Passionately Human, No Less Divine,* religious historian Wallace Best has brilliantly revealed how lower and working-class southern migrants significantly altered the urban religious landscape in Chicago with their "folk emotional orality" in Pentecostal, Spiritualist and Baptist storefronts. These rural southern migrants, such as Pentecostal minister Elder Lucy Smith, a Georgia migrant, maintained the "rural, folk culture of the South" that ultimately "became the very expression of modern African American religion in the urban North, especially among black female domestic servants."[17] He also suggested that these southern migrants impacted more mainline and traditional Baptist and A.M.E. churches. In her noteworthy essay, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s, historian Evelyn Higginbotham describes how the folk emotionalism of the urban working class exhibited on religious "race records" countered the ethical values and aesthetic standards of the traditional Protestantism of the black middle class (as well as the working-class' secular and blues cultures).[18] Higginbotham asserts, "The [race] records validated the creative energies of the rural folk, turned urban proletariat, as an alternate, competing voice within African American communities."[19] She further contends, "At the most prosaic levels, the ascendant voice of southern folk culture challenged the middle-class

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17 Wallace Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 183. Best has a nuanced view of the "folk" religious sensibilities that transcend the premodern and modern, rural and urban splits that was popularized by the Chicago sociologists and writer, Richard Wright.

18 Evelyn Higginbotham, *Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s*, *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie Glaude (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 979.

19 Ibid, 980.

ideology of racial uplift as pronounced by educated religious leaders…."[20] In *The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion*, religious historian Lerone Martin convincingly shows how African American phonograph preachers played a major role in furthering the rural diaspora by filling their recorded sermons with the folk style of "improvisation, tonal modulation, and rhythmic chanting."[21] The familiar folk sermons of celebrity preacher, J.M. Gates, a rural migrant, helped southern migrants weather, at times the, "unfamiliar aural and aesthetic urban religious culture."[22] All in all, the category of the folk has been employed to demonstrate the ways rural southern blacks and the working class forged a vibrant religious culture in modern America.

Contemporary scholars of African American religions have used the folk category as a heuristic device to trace the vernacular and popular religious expressions of black rural southerners and working class populations in the modern world. The attention of scholars to rural and southern religious cultures has contributed to new scholarship and sparked discussion about a multitude of religious orientations in black life. Yet, the field of African American religion has often overlooked the influence of the social ethnographers and fieldworkers who have played a significant role in framing the so-called folk religious expressions of rural southern and lower class blacks in the first half of the twentieth century. *To Know The Soul of A People* takes up this neglected task by closely examining social scientists and folklorists who were invested in the empirical study of the religious expressions of black (rural) southern and lower class populations. The notion of the "south" and "lower or working class" in black religious cultures was

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[20] Ibid, 983.
[21] Lerone A. Martin, *The Phonograph and the Making African American Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 94
[22] Ibid.

partly attributed to the fieldwork of early twentieth century social scientists and folklorists. In this project, I argue that the engagement of social scientists and fieldworkers in studying the intersection of race, class and religion had a hand in shaping the perceptions of the religious beliefs and expressions of the "black folk" or "folk Negro"---typically rural southern and working class populations. How were certain religious expressions such as the emotional orality and supernatural belief-systems ascribed to particular racialized and classed bodies in American society? What were the social and political factors that animated the social scientists and folklorists' fieldwork of the religious expressions of the black southern and working class? This project will focus on particular social scientists and folklorists' use of the folk category in order to describe how religion shaped the meaning and contours of "southern" and "working-class" in the field of twentieth-century African American religion.

To Know the Soul of a People is an intellectual history that focuses on the role of the folk category in the field of twentieth-century African American religion. As an intellectual history, my project will show how the folk category was applied to "southern" and "working-class" black religion and shaped by the social and political climate of the twentieth century. To tell an intellectual history is also to demonstrate how various professional and institutional organizations and networks contributed to defining the meaning of black southern and working-class religion in the twentieth century. My project is inspired by recent historians' preoccupation with how the field of African American religion has been studied. In *The Burden of Black Religion,* religious historian Curtis Evans shows how social scientists and race men constructed the "Negro Church" in order to resist the view that African Americans were "inherently religious" and posited

a functionalist perspective of black religion that championed social reform and moral uplift. Evans notes that the idea that blacks were "inherently religious" was attributed to what George Fredrickson dubbed the "romantic racialists" of the early nineteenth century, but it took on a different meaning with the rise of the natural and social sciences beginning in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. In *Spirit Walks Beside Me,* African American historian Barbara Savage astutely explores the tension between black religion and progressive politics through an engagement with the intellectual history in the prior decades before the modern civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s. By studying the social scientists, she dismantled the essentialist perspective that "black religion" or the "Negro or black church" ultimately led to the triumph of the modern civil rights movement.

Taking my cue from contemporary religious scholars, this project's focus on the folk-category in the social sciences and folklore research discloses that descriptions of "black religion" are politically proscriptive and historically specific. *To Know the Soul of the People* underscores that the tension between religion and politics often centers on the discourse of the "rural" and "southern" in the modern study of African American religion. By exploring the history of the folk category through social scientists and folklorists' study, we understand the construction of cultures of the black lower or working class in America. My project underscores how the field of African American religion coalesced around social scientists and federal folklorists engaged in the political future of the "black folk" in the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, as historian Robin Kelley asserts, "folk and traditio[n] are socially constructed categories that have

something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and policing the boundaries of modernism."[23]

II. The Negro Folk Religion and The Meaning of Progress in the Wake of Hampton

The folk category has a long history in Western thought. The folk category in African American religion gained intellectual and cultural capital after American Reconstruction in the nineteenth century. Alice Bacon, a white missionary, organized graduates and staff at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute into a professional folklore society. They created a folklore and ethnology section in the Institute's periodical, *Southern Workman.* Founded in 1893, the Hampton Folklore Society was one of the first predominantly black professional societies dedicated to collecting the "Lore of the Negroes in the Southern States."[24] The Hampton society provided materials of black southerners for the scientific journal, *The Journal of American Folklore*.

The Hampton Folklore Society grew out of a response to the renowned geologist Nathaniel Shaler's *Atlantic Monthly* article, "Science and the African Problem," published in 1890. In this article, Shaler urged anyone who had a vested interest to undertake a scientific study of the Negro problem in order to provide solutions to aid the process of adjusting blacks to modern America.[25] The Hampton Folklore Society

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[23] Robin D.G. Kelley, "Deconstructing the Folk," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec., 1992), 1402

[24] This phrase, "Lore of the Negro in the Southern States," was written by the principal founder of the American Folklore Society, William W. Newell in the first editorial of the *Journal of American Folklore.* His recognition of the "Lore of the Negro of the Southern Union" was significant in that it gave professional and scientific legitimacy to the study of folklore of southern blacks. Previously American folklore was equivalent to Native Americans and Scottish populations. The American Folklore Society was engaged in the professionalization of folklore societies. In this sense, folklore was imagined as a "handmaid of anthropology," and not a literary or amateurish hobby. William Newbell, "On the Field and Work of a Journal of American Folk-lore," *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 1, No. 1 (April-June, 1888), 3-7.

[25] I am indebted to Jonathan Walton for introducing me to the works of Nathaniel Shaler in a lecture, "Scapegoating the Faith: Early Social Scientific Approaches to the Negro Problem," Nov. 11, 2011,

collected "folk" materials for the sake of understanding the "ideas and motives" of "cabin people." Their effort to comprehend the ideas and motives of the black cabin people was designed to prepare these people for modern America. In an address at the ninth annual meeting for the American Folklore Society at Johns Hopkins University in December of 1897, Bacon asserted,

> Our interest in folk-lore is used, not so much to help us in interpreting the past as it is to aid us in understanding present conditions, and to make it easier for us to push forward the philanthropic work that Hampton is doing.[26]

By mentioning the "philanthropic work of Hampton [Institute]," Bacon highlighted how the Society's folklore research was connected to aiding in the moral and industrial uplift of the ignorant and uncivilized members of the black race. She stressed that the interest in organizing a folklore society at Hampton grew out of an interest by the alums to "bridge the great gulf fixed between the minds of the educated and uneducated and civilized and uncivilized" of the race.

Bacon strongly believed that superstitious notions offered one of the best mediums to comprehend the mentalities of the ignorant and uncivilized cabin people. Alumni complained that superstitious notions were hindering their work to educate the folk in the rural districts of the American South. In a letter entitled, "A Lamp In A Dark Corner," an unnamed graduate complained that the people in his part of the country were mostly "ignorant and superstitious…and believe in ghosts, hags, jack o' lanterns, and

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Emory University. For more on the debate between Shaler and Samuel Armstrong, the founder of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, see: Donald J. Waters, "Introduction," *Strange Ways and Sweet Dreams: Afro-American Folklore from the Hampton Institute,* ed. Waters (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983), 185-192. Waters offers the best historical and intellectual background of the Hampton Folklore Society.

[26] Alice M. Bacon, "Work and Methods of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 11, No. 40 (Jan.,-Mar., 1898), 17. Bacon read this paper at the 9th Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, Baltimore, Maryland, December 9, 1897.

innumerable signs and sayings." He further remarked: I wish I knew what to do to hinder their belief in such things…"[27] Bacon noted that many graduates were able to recall past "hag stories" that they heard in the cabin houses.[28] Due to Bacon's personal history in nursing, she was hard pressed to understand the superstitious notions and to fully understand why blacks relied on their supernatural traditions over and against the advances of modern medicine especially at the local Dixie Hospital in Elizabeth County, Virginia. The folk category was also extended to the prayers, sermons, and songs in the evangelical revivals in the postbellum South.

Alice Bacon and the Hampton Folklore Society set the tone for constructing the meaning of "southern" religious cultures of the black folk on a premodern and modern axis. The "southern" and the "folk" were defined in negation to the "modern."[29] Although the Hampton Folklore Society was short-lived, the folk category persisted in mapping southern and consequently working-class religious cultures well into the twentieth century. Twentieth-century social scientists and federal folklorists further employed the folk-category to understand the religious expressions and behaviors of prison laborers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and domestic servants in the South. These social scientists and folklorists actually became gatekeepers whose fieldwork among black southerners were legitimated by their professional affiliations with academic, philanthropic and federal organizations in the first half of the twentieth century. The

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[27] *Strange Ways and Sweet Dreams,* 169.

[28] Alice Bacon, "Work and Methods of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society," 19. "Hag stories" were nightmares, such as an Afro-American vampire, which Bacon stated was a combination of European and African superstition. She also stressed to the American Folk-Lore Society that the Hampton folklorists needed a gramophone to record the "plantation songs," prayers, and sermons at revivals in the South.

[29] Robin Kelley "Deconstructing the Folk," 1402. Kelley notes, "Folk and Modern are both mutually dependent concepts embedded in unstable historically and socially constituted systems of classification."

meaning ascribed to religious cultures of the southern and folk Negro was determined by their interpretations of "modern" society. To search for the religious souls of the "Folk Negro" was a modern endeavor.

Scope of the Study

To Know the Soul of the People is organized around an unusual group of social scientists and folklorists in the field of religion: Howard Washington Odum, Charles S. Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston and Alan Lomax. These social scientists were all using the folk-category in their field studies of black southerners from 1925-1945. Although Odum, Johnson, Hurston and Lomax were outside any affiliation with a religious body, these "secularists" understood that religion was an invaluable tool to fully comprehend the everyday worlds of the Folk Negro. By focusing on these social scientists and folklorists, this work questions the traditional secular-religion divide. My project demonstrates how their biographies, political ideologies, and professional affiliations animated their field studies of the religious cultures of the Folk Negro. Chapter 1 will examine Howard Odum, a white sociologist, who was instrumental in building the folk-background studies at the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill beginning in 1924. His development of folk background studies was a precursor to his southern regional studies after the Great Depression. More specifically, I will demonstrate how his study of the religious expressions of the folk and southern Negro underscored his attempt to merge his southern liberalism with his belief in racial instincts. To understand his view of the folk Negro requires an investigation of his graduate studies in psychology and sociology prior to World War I. In Chapter 2, I will examine the distinguished African American sociologist Charles S. Johnson's study

of superstitious beliefs within the wider network of racial liberalism between 1934-1945. Unlike Odum, Johnson desired to steer the discussion of black religion away from fixed racial traits. Instead, Johnson and others underscored the role of social and economic conditions that trapped black southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers in an elementary stage of development in American life. His attention to social and economic conditions was an attempt to take advantage of what historian Alan Brinkley dubbed the "Age of Reform" during the New Deal era.

Chapter 3 will examine the work of Zora Neale Hurston within the study of black religion. Following religious scholars Tracey Hucks, Dianne Stewart and Richard Turner, I also reflect on Hurston's work as a scholar of religion and anthropology.[30] To fulfill this task, I will situate Hurston within the Columbia School of anthropology under the towering anthropologist Franz Boas. It was the field of anthropology that solidified her desire to document the spiritual genius of black southerners on their own terms. She embodied a Boasian view of culture that countered the cultural evolutionary framework perpetuated by Charles Johnson and other racial liberals in the third decade of the twentieth century. The last chapter will take a look at the federal folklorist, Alan Lomax's recording of the religious songs of black southern prisoners, domestics and farmers between 1933 and 1942. What is interesting about Lomax's work was how the emphasis on the "common man" during the New Deal era colored his fascination with the folk spirituals of southern blacks.

The studies of the religious expressions of black southern and working-class during 1925-1945 disclose the impact of the folk category on the field of African

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[30] Tracey Hucks, "Perspectives in Lived History: Religion, Ethnography, and the Study of African Diasporic Religions," *Practical Matters* (Spring, 2010), 1-17; Dianne M. Stewart-Diakite and Tracey Hucks, "Africana Religious Studies: Toward a Transdisciplinary Agenda in an Emerging Field," *Journal of Africana Religions*, Vol. 1. No. 1 (2013), 28-77; Richard B. Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 12-38.

American religion. By investigating the biographies, political ideologies, and professional affiliations of the social scientists and folklorists, we will see how the folk category alerts us to the view that religion played a significant role in the making of the black lower and working-class populations. In the end, folk and southern religion serves as a way to organize cultures and behaviors along racial and economic differences in modern America.

Chapter 1

"Treasure of Folk-Gems": The Religious Mind of the Folk Negro and the Pitfalls of White Southern Liberalism

Folk-Lore cannot restrict itself to a purely sociological, that is, exterior, view of its subject-matter. Not only is its ultimate aim to illustrate and explain the workings of the human soul; but even at the present stage of its advance it cannot dispense with psychological considerations.

-R.R. Marett, "Presidential Address: Psychology and Folk-Lore" (1914)

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) sociologist Howard Washington Odum and his graduate research assistant, Guy B. Johnson strategically published *The Negro and His Songs* in 1925.[1] Reflecting on his advisor's choice to publish this book on southern black songs, Johnson recalled that Odum wanted to do something that was both non-controversial and popular[2]: he hoped that this collection of songs "typical of the southern Negro" would put the Chapel Hill social scientists and their newly founded Institute of Research in the Social Sciences (IRSS) on the national radar. Johnson

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[1] Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925). Both Odum and Johnson published *The Negro Workaday Songs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926).

[2] Guy Benton Johnson and Guion Griffis Johnson, *Research in Service to Society: The First Fifty Years of the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), 133. The non-controversial aspects of Odum's logic stemmed from his recent battle with the Protestant clergy over two articles published in the university's scholarly journal, *Social Forces*, in 1924. These articles were published in the contexts of the controversy of education and evolution within the state of North Carolina (failed anti-evolutionary bill) and wider America (Scopes Monkey Trail). Although university administrators and civic leaders protected Odum and the development of the social sciences at UNC, the vehement attack of the southern Presbyterian and Baptist clergy significantly altered Odum's orientation to his work on the South and its problems. For a more in-depth discussion of the impact of the Protestant clergy (and textile mill managers too!) on Odum's regional work, see Wayne D. Brazil, *Howard W. Odum: The Building Years, 1884-1930* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 408-467.

recalled, "[Odum] wanted to see the Institute achieve something that would gain national attention early in its existence and thus help perpetuate itself."[3]

Odum's rationale to leverage *The Negro and His Songs* to generate mainstream (and professional!) acclaim was timely. He was quite aware that the "Negro was in Vogue" in the second decade of the twentieth century,[4] as we see substantiated in the commercial success of the southern and folk spirituals and blues performances by Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson and N. Robert Dett's Hampton choir. In addition to the commercial success of musical concerts and race-records, print culture also added to the frenzy around black southern or folk musical production in the modern marketplace.[5] In the year of 1925 alone, alongside Odum and Johnson's *The Negro and His Songs* were published Nicholas Ballanta's *St. Helena Island Songs*, James and Rosamond Johnsons' *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, Robert Kennedy's *Mellows*, and Dorothy Scarborough's *On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs.*[6]

Similar to other print materials on black southern and folk songs, Odum and Johnson's collection of religious, social, and work songs was enhanced by their aesthetic

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[3] Ibid. For more discussion on Odum reasoning's behind his publication of *The Negro and His Songs,* see Lynn Sanders Moss, *Howard W. Odum's Folklore Odyssey: Transformation to Tolerance through African American Folk Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 22-23. In her interview with Guy Johnson in 1985, he recalled Odum saying: "I think if we just went in for stu dying race relations, which is your main interest I know, nobody's going to pay much attention and we might get in a lot of trouble because things are so conservative. But practically everybody, no matter how narrow-minded he is will say, Oh the Negro is a natural musician, he's a great singer, and even conservative people can appreciate black music, so here we've got this chance, so let's do this."

[4] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*: *An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 223-233.

[5] For a more in-depth study of the popular success of race records, see Lerone A. Martin's *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 32-61. Martin noted, "Beginning in 1920, record labels, about fifteen in all, flooded the market with African American blues and jazz artists, helping national record sales to top one hundred million for the first time in history. By the end of the decade, an average of ten new race records hit the market every week and black consumers cheerfully bought them [32]."

[6] See: Guy Benton Johnson, "Recent Contributions to the Study of American Negro Songs," *Social Forces*, Vol. 4, No.9 (Jan., 1926), pp. 57-71.

appreciation of the "essence of [black] genius and spirit."[7] In their estimation, these southern and folk songs had attained the "realm of art." They asserted, "Here may be seen much of the naked essence of poetry with unrefined language which reaches for the Negro a power of expression far beyond that which modern refinement of language and thought may ordinarily approach."[8]

Yet the music and aesthetics were secondary to Odum and Johnson's primary interest. The race problem that plagued post-World War I America took precedence over music and aesthetics. One reviewer noted that *The Negro and His Songs* was only "secondarily a collection of songs for the authors seek a knowledge of the race and its problems through the medium of songs."[9] Prominent sociologist Robert E. Park likewise noted that, "The present volume [*The Negro and His Songs*] exhibit[s] the character and quality, not merely of the Negro's music, but of the Negro's life and mind rather [… than only] preserve the songs for the song's sake."[10] Underneath the popular appeal to wider mainstream society was a defense of what Odum dubbed the "treasures of folk-gems"; he believed that a study of black southern music and culture could advance scientific research and subsequently policies in the overall effort to fix the race-relations problem, especially in the Jim Crow South. Johnson argued that "Negro songs…offe[r] almost

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[7] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs,* 5.

[8] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs*, 268-269.

[9] *The Sewanee Review,* Vol. 34, No. 3 (July-September, 1926), 382.

[10] Robert E. Park, "Review," *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 31, No. 6 (May, 1926), 821-824. Park rightly mentioned *The Negro and His Songs* in light of Odum's early work on the Negro social and mental traits. In my estimation, Park sees some continuity in Odum's project from 1909-1925.

unlimited opportunities for research, not only for the musician and student of literature, but to the sociologist and psychologist."[11]

In particular, it was the folk-spirituals and hymns that represented the "folk-gems" in the scientific study of race in the American South, for, according to Odum, they were the "truest expression of the folk-mind and feeling" and "revealed much of the inner consciousness of a race." Indeed, Odum saw that song and rhythm making was a unique and dominant characteristic of black Protestantism. He remarked that black "religion [was] often synonymous with [their] song." In his obtuse writing style (which his colleagues dubbed 'Odum-esque'), he furthered remarked that black "plaintive appeals in prayer, his emotional and religious nature, his love of rhythm and melody…his whole nature---all of these reveal within him what we call the musical nature of the race."[12]
More importantly, such study of black Protestant vernacular culture was instrumental in positing a more scientific understanding of race in hopes of ultimately administering social and political solutions to the race problem. Odum's study of black southern Protestant sounds differed from that of both literary and anthropological folklorists whose documentation of primitive cultures was usually disconnected from social planning. Instead, as literary scholar Lynn Sanders rightly notes, Odum was ultimately concerned with how black southern or folk religious sounds confronted larger social issues of the day.[13] By labeling his intellectual endeavor a "folk-science," Odum indirectly participated in the professionalization of folklore studies by merging it with the scientific

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[11] Guy B. Johnson, "Recent Contribution to the Study of American Negro Songs" in *Social Forces*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (June, 1926), 791.

[12] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs*, 38.

[13] Lynn Moss Sanders, *Howard W. Odum's Folklore Odyssey: Transformation to Tolerance through African American Folk Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 18-19.

study of human cultures and behaviors typical of early twentieth-century American intellectual life.

This chapter will explore the importance Odum ascribed to black Protestantism in his attempt to capture the often repressed "folk mind and feelings" and to document fact-based knowledge about the development of the Negro race in modern society.[14] The purportedly scientific character of folklore research, particularly research of the Negro church, rested on Odum's investment in what he called the primal 'mental operations' supposedly unique to southern Negroes. In this chapter, I argue that a closer examination of his notion of the folk-mind and feelings exhibited in the southern Protestantism of the Negro masses was a by-product of the broader dilemma of southern-based white liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century: his belief that there were distinctive characteristics (e.g. impulses and instincts) that he felt naturally separated the black and white races (i.e. 'racial differentials) beyond artificial laws of *de jure* segregation. Although he rejected his earlier views of inherited racial traits, he was never clear on how regional-environment contributed to different racial characteristics. He had trouble reconciling his preoccupation with instincts and attention to regional environment. According to Odum, folk denoted the psychic domain attributed to what he abstractly called, "southern black masses" and, later the working or loafing "common man."[15]

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[14] Odum constantly used the notion of racial 'development' as an outcome of his folklore research. In his *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, Odum stated, "to reach some insight into what the Negro appears to be and what he may possibly become in his future development." Odum, *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro Race in Southern Towns* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1910), 15. *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro* was Odum's second dissertation at Columbia University.

[15] Odum was extremely ambivalent about what group of southern African Americans clearly represented the folk. In his second dissertation, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, he used the term southern Negroes, as a shorthand, I contend, for the working class. By the time he reached UNC, folk was equated with the Negro common man, like his field work with John "Left-Wing Gordon.

While this Georgia native championed Negro advancement and abhorred white mob violence, it was his scientific view of racial instincts and impulses that contributed to the conservative and reactionary South that he fought so hard to abolish.[16] Beholden to the late nineteenth-century American intellectual trend that integrated religion and biological naturalism, his view of the folk-concept indirectly exposed his sympathy for the post-Civil War South that lead to his accommodationist politics to its racial status quo. By the 1930s, he shifted his attention away from black folk cultures and espoused a folk regional sociology that sought to explain why southern whites were resistant to "stateways and technicways," and consequently not ready for racial integration.[17] To be sure, his perspective on the unique "folk-mind and feelings" most exhibited in black Protestantism appeared too outdated for many liberal social scientists who were growing restless with

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Odum met Gordon while the later was working construction on the UNC campus. Odum exchanged liquor to Gordon's for stories that later became the inspiration for a fictional trilogy on a musicianer and wanderer name, Black Ulysses. Odum wrote three novels: *Rainbow Round My Shoulders: The Blue Trail of Black Ulysses* (1928); *Wings on My Feet: Black Ulysses at the Wars* (1929); and *Cold Blue Moon* (1931).

16 William B. Thomas argued that Odum's social reform in the South contained a pragmatic conservatism and acquiescence to Southern sensibilities and racial separation. See Thomas, "Conservative Currents in Howard Washington Odum's Agenda for Social Reform in Southern Race Relations, 1930-1936" in *Phylon* Vol. 45, No. 2 (1984:2), 121. Others, like historian Glenda Gilmore, also discuss that Odum view of regional folkways (particularly the "majority of white Southerners) was meant to foster gradualism while [he] argued, convincingly enough, that white Southerners were not ready for integration [204]." See Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 201-246. Yet my disagreement with Gilmore and other contemporary scholars is that they generally argue that Odum transitioned from a perspective of race traits to regional and environmental conditioning, particularly in his concept of the folk. What is often overlooked is that Odum maintained his view of instincts and impulses unique to black southerners although he abandoned his view of inherent inferiority. He had an intellectual basis for racial segregation in addition to his practical strategy of gradualism. And Odum was never quite clear on what he meant by racial differentials.

17 Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 204; For explanation on the tension between folkways and stateways, see: Odum, "Folk and Regional Conflict as a Field of Sociological Study," *American Sociological Society* (May 1931), 1-17. This was his Presidential Address read before the American Sociological Society.

the category of race by the third decade of the twentieth century.[18] One of these liberal-minded social scientists was his former student, Guy Johnson, who eventually became a tenured faculty member after the completion of his dissertation on black music in 1927.[19] While working on the Myrdal-Carnegie Project, he really made it a point to distance himself from his former advisor's theory of folk Negroes and their religion. Johnson said that Odum "shared contemporary scientific notions about instincts, race traits, and the like, and as science changed its point of view on these matters shortly thereafter, his interpretations seemed woefully outdated."[20] To many emerging social scientists, Odum was a "very kind fool who struggled to modernize his ideas."[21]

The nature of this chapter is threefold. First, I will briefly discuss the organization of Negro and folk-background studies within the Institute for Research in the Social

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[18] Historian Harvard Stikoff argued that by the New Deal era there was an intellectual consensus forged in the wake of Franz Boas' critique of the biological view of race. I will discuss this "intellectual consensus" more in Chapter 2. Stikoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade,* 30th Anniversary (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), 143-162.

[19] In fact, Johnson's dissertation, "A Study of the Musical Talent of the American Negro," actually stood in theoretical opposition to the references to the inherent musicality of the southern Negro in *The Negro and His Songs.* Using the Seashore music test on nearly 3,350 Negroes (in grade school and college), Johnson concluded that the measurements in pitch, intensity, time, rhythm and memory among blacks and whites were relatively the same and that "Negroes [were] neither superior nor inferior to whites in musical talent…" See: Johnson, "Musical Talent and The Negro," *Musical Supervisors' Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Oct., 1928), 83.

[20] Guy Johnson, "Howard Washington Odum: An Appreciation," *Phylon*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1955:1), 101-102.

[21] Swedish economist Gunnary Myrdal said Odum was a "very kind fool who struggled to modernize his ideas." Donald W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 19. According to Guy Johnson, the tension between Myrdal and Odum was attributed to a clash of personalities. Johnson stated that Myrdal was brilliant yet flashy with an exuberance that was at times coy and effeminate. He liked quick repartee and lively interactions." On the other hand, Odum was a country boy with a "slower pace, and I think there was simply something in the Mrydal style that struck him as artificial." It was also stated that Odum was slightly disappointed that the Carnegie Corporation distributed so much money to Myrdal for the study. Donald Southern correspondence with Guy Johnson, July 12, 1982, *The Guy B. Johnson Papers*, The Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. For more on Myrdal and Odum, see Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Sciences and overall southern white liberalism. Negro and folk-background studies were designed to address the racial violence that gripped the South and the wider nation during what James Weldon Johnson called the "Red Summer" of the post-World War I context. Second, I will give an intellectual genealogy of Odum's view of the folk mind and feelings. His understanding of the treasures of the folk gems and its relationship to instincts were cultivated among first-generation social scientists who were fascinated with studying the mental origins and development of modern human beings and society. Many early social scientists, such as William Sumner, Wilhelm Wundt, Franklin Giddings, and others turned to the category of the "folk" to ground their understanding of human behavior in order to wrestle with the rapid changes of modern society. More specifically, it was America's first doctor of psychology, Granville Stanley Hall and his study of adolescent developmental psychology that initially shaped Odum's perspective of the folk-mind he identified in the religious cultures of black southern masses. (And according to genetic or developmental psychology, religion provided a window into the intricacies of the human mind or soul.) And religion played a significant role in grasping the post-1890's "new psychology," which Hall described as the youth's love [for] intense states of mind and passionate fondness of excitement."[22] Lastly, I will highlight Guy Johnson, whose work on folk-spirituals and black Protestantism in general challenged Odum's folk-science by replacing with a new class-based analysis the former's old race-based analysis (Chapter 2).

II. The Folk Mind In Southern Black Religion

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[22] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 261-307; Curtis Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 105-139. Evans briefly mentions the connection between Odum's study of the Folk Negro and Hall's study of the child.

The support of UNC president Henry W. Chase and director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund (LSRM), Beardsley Ruml, provided Odum the resources to found the IRSS in the summer of 1924.[23] Ruml's decision to disseminate $97,500 over the course of three years to the IRSS through the newly arranged LSRM was attributed to his amazement that a social scientific research center could exist in the Bible Belt South. The existence of a scientific research center tailored specifically to the social needs of the "one but many Souths" was certainly a dream come true for Odum.[24] Prior to his tenure at UNC-Chapel Hill, his attempt to develop the social sciences and liberal arts education at his alma mater, Emory College, was derailed by Bishop Warren Akin Chandler and Methodist conservatism.[25] Born and raised on a small dairy farm in rural Georgia after Reconstruction, Odum had developed a romantic and sympathetic portrait of the southern white folk or common man. Against New Deal southern liberals, he stated, "It is because I know and love these millions of common [white] folk in the South that I must stand with them…The Negro question means to them for God, for home, and country."[26] It was partially due to his intimate experiences with yeoman farmers, ex-Confederate soldiers, and bitter ex-slave owners in Bethlehem and Oxford, Georgia, that made him feel qualified to organize a research center that would explain the South and its potentials and problems to the scientific community and the whole nation.

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[23] "Histories and Descriptions of Institute for Research in Social Sciences, 1933-1950, *Southern Historical Collection*, University of North Carolina.

[24] I borrowed this phrase, "the one but many Souths" from Odum's *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936).

[25] *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* Jan. 13, 1919, 2. This article announced his new appointment as dean of liberal arts education while Emory was making its transition to the Atlanta campus in North Druid Hills Park. For more detailed information on Odum's tenure as the dean of liberal arts education and the Methodist conservatism at Emory College, see: Wayne Brazil "Emory's First Dean," *Emory Magazine* (Spring, 1975).

[26] I borrowed this quote from Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 227-8.

This confidence also extended to knowledge about the southern Negro. He distinguished his intimate knowledge of the South over and against the "learned ignorati" or colleagues who critiqued the south without having the slightest idea about its folk culture(s).[27] His relentless work ethic and devotion to the South coupled with his personal relationship with philanthropic organizations, like the Rockefeller Foundation, helped to catapult the research institution into the national spotlight as a site for southern investigation and policy.

By the 1920s, the development of a social scientific research institute was a part of a broader university and state plan to revitalize the curriculum and to modernize (or industrialize) the state of North Carolina. At the time of Odum's arrival in the Piedmont region, Chase and his UNC administrators added professional and graduate programs to the public institution's curriculum while state legislators and business leaders worked to elevate the state with the creation of "spinning, weaving, and knitting mills, manufacturing of tobacco and furniture, development of hydroelectric power, in highway construction and sales of motor vehicles, in the number of chain stores and one-industry towns."[28] The UNC academic administrators and the board of trustees intentionally revitalized the public university in order to prepare a new professional class to industrialize the state.[29] Since the social sciences were a part of the broader academic and

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[27] Odum used "learned ignorati" in his review of the Scopes Monkey Trial. John Thomas Scopes was brought to a civil trial for violating the prohibition against teaching evolution in the classroom in Tennessee. Disgusted by the spectacle in the courtroom, Odum framed the fundamentalists-modernists controversy as a larger problem between the common folk and intellectuals. His development of folk was a way to bridge the distance between common folk and modern scientists. Odum, *Duel to Death*, *Social Forces* (September 1925), 189-194.

[28] Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1989), 290.

[29] Ibid. 291. Tullos argues, "Chase, the urbane spokesman of what would soon become the most progressive university in the South, understood what the institution's trustees foresaw for the

state revitalization plan, Odum organized the research institute specifically to engage in problems of the social sciences with a concentration on "state and regional conditions." The research for incorporation of state and southern regions into the wider industrial American economy endowed the IRSS and wider UNC with the marked distinction as the hub of southern liberalism. According to Guy Johnson, the Institute's "promise was to try to lead the way to a new state and a new South through social science research and interpretation."[30] In this sense, the Chapel Hill group stood in contrast to Donald Davidson and the anti-modern agrarians at Vanderbilt University; they were at the forefront of white educational and agri-industrial change.

Yet agriculture and industry were not the only places of state and regional ferment. Race was in the spotlight, particularly because of the white mob lynchings and race riots that swept through the major cities and southern regions after WWI. A year before Odum arrived at UNC, the heightened racial unrest gripped the American South in the aftermath of the Great War. In a New York Times column, R.L. Duffus attributed the racial unrest to the black migration and demobilization of black troops. Duffus summed up that the "general unrest caused by the World War, the migration of Negroes...the demobilization of Negro troops which had served in France had brought tension between white and colored populations to a point where widespread violence threatened to break out at any moment."[31] The war, according to literary scholar Gerald Early, "intensified

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postwar era at Chapel Hill—a university that could produce trained professionals and managers for an industrializing society."

[30] Guy B. Johnson and Griffis Johnson, *Research in Service to Society: The First Fifty Years of the Institute for Research in Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 27.

[31] "South Solving Its Own Problems: Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation Has Improved Conditions in Many Places and Plans Further Investigation," *New York Times,* April 6, 1930.

how black Americans thought about the nature of their citizenship" and generated a new consciousness and self-determination for racial democracy. In his editorial, "Returning Soldiers," W.E.B. Du Bois noted, "But by God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that [the] war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land." Du Bois further remarked, "We return fighting. Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America…"[32] This new consciousness among blacks sparked intense forms of white nativism that led to violence and terror. South Carolina Congressman James F. Byrd suggested that Du Bois and other leaders such as William Trotter, A. Philip Randolph, and A. Candler should be indicted for espionage and inciting riots and antagonism among blacks against the country. One white southerner said that 90% of all the race troubles [were] the result of the Negro forgetting his place."[33] In his article in *The Nation*, Odum attributed the white mob violence and lynching to the domination of folkways---the elemental factor of fear. Odum asserted, "Lynching…adds nothing to the richness of human living…It accentuates devastating fear. It sets the folkways over against the stateways in lawless revolt."[34]

The white mob violence and lynching precipitated the emergence of a white southern liberal contingent in the form of the Commission of Interracial Cooperation

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[32] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, XVII (May, 1919), 13.

[33] Ann J. McDonough, *Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the CIC and Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954* (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Virginia, 1993), 34.

[34] Howard Odum, "Lynchings, Fears, and Folkways," *Folk, Region, and Society: Selected Papers of Howard W. Odum, eds. Katherine Jocher, Guy Johnson, George Simpson, and Rupert Vance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 41. Originally published in *The Nation* on December 30, 1931. Odum's attention to "folkways" was inspired by his reading of William G. Sumner's *Folkways* published in 1906.

(CIC). According to Ann McDonough, the CIC became the principal institution where southern liberals grappled with the South's legacy of racial and economic inequality."[35] Odum and Chapel Hill social scientists such as Guy Johnson, Rupert Vance and Arthur Raper were directly involved in the CIC. Odum served as regional president of the Atlanta-based organization in 1937, before changing the CIC into the Southern Regional Council in 1944. Led by a former Methodist minister Will Alexander, the CIC sought to quell the mob violence and lynching through interracial cooperation. For instance, they started an anti-lynching campaign in 1926. In the *New York Times*, Alexander asserted that the "well-founded conviction that cooperation is a method by which the racial groups here in America will achieve a better life and larger mutual appreciation."[36] With funding provided by YMCA's National War Council, northern philanthropic organizations, and local church denominations, the CIC organized state and local interracial committees to promote interracial cooperation over and against the "bickering, controversy and struggle." The reference to the "bickering, controversy and struggle" was a direct aim at political protest and mobilization in the South. The CIC deplored the more federal-oriented and confrontational strategies of the National Association of the Advancement of Color People (N.A.A.C.P), Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) and Communist Party. A robust moderate impulse informed the CIC's programs and activities. Odum insisted on a cautious and moderate approach to the race problem in the South.

Will Alexander appointed T.J. Woofter and Robert Eleazer to head the educational and research department of the CIC. Alexander envisioned that the study of

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[35] Ann J. McDonough, *Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the CIC and Southern Regional Council,* 20.

[36] *New York Times*, March 2, 1925.

race would be incorporated into the curriculum and research at southern universities and colleges. In this sense, Alexander and the CIC looked to Odum and the Chapel Hill group (e.g. Arthur Raper, Rupert Vance, and Guy Johnson) to promote interracial cooperation through social scientific research and curriculum in order to increase mutual understanding between black and white southern races.[37] Odum taught a seminar on the Negro in the sociology department at UNC beginning in 1921, and Johnson continued it from 1927 until 1969. What distinctly marked the white southern liberals including Odum, was their promotion of racial cooperation without "challenging the pattern of segregation itself." At a CIC meeting in Atlanta, theologian Howard Thurman stated that Will Alexander and CIC were white "men and women of definite good will and for the period, of enlightened social concern." Yet Thurman also noted that despite their enlightenment and their political activity (e.g. protesting police brutality and inhumane treatment of helpless Negroes on chain gangs), the CIC and the overall liberal white contingent operated "within a framework which accepted and did not challenge the patterns of segregation."[38] T.J. Woofter championed the mindset of many southern whites when he noted that racial harmony was possible as long as "segregation was not the issue." Howard Odum thought the problem of desegregation overlooked the deeply ensconced southern folkways that governed white and black group behaviors. Gilmore noted, "Odum disdained legal and political challenges to Jim Crow that would force white southerners to change since he believed that folkways trumped formally organized

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[37] Unlike Alexander and Odum, Arthur Raper and Rupert Vance were outspoken about their support of racial integration. Guy and Guion Johnson eventually followed Raper and Vance in the mid to late 30s.

[38] Howard Thurman, *Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy of Segregation and the Ground of Hope,* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1989), 12-13.

society including government and law."[39] Odum championed his version of racial advancement and harmony. His attempt to strike a middle ground between modernization and social reform and, what he called, southern "folkways" illustrated the ignoble paradox of white southern liberalism. This paradox was most apparent in his use of the "Folk Negro." A haunting essentialism invaded Odum's notion of the Folk Negro. Many liberals, like Gunnar Myrdal, felt that his notion of the Folk Negro fell prey to supporting a biological view of racial difference.

Odum felt that mutual understanding would cure the racial tension in the South. To advance mutual understanding between the black and white races in the segregated South, and to overcome whites' persistent ignorance and prejudice, Odum organized Negro and folk-background studies at the IRSS. He argued that racial tension was heightened due to a lack of scientific and factual knowledge of the Negro. Odum felt that religious music and culture provided scientific knowledge of the Negro. In *The Negro and His Songs,* Odum argued that, "Posterity has often judged these peoples without having a passing knowledge of their inner life, while the treasures of folklore and song, the psychic, religious, and social expression of the race, have been permitted to remain in complete obscurity."[40] Likewise, in his earlier study of "Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negro" published in the *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* in July of 1909,[41] and in his *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, Odum

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[39] Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950,* 228

[40] Howard Odum and Guy Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs*, 8. This same sentence was reprinted in both dissertations.

[41] As I will show throughout this chapter, Odum never abandoned his early views of race in his dissertations written prior to World War I. In fact, he simply recycled the same sentences from his first and second dissertations (1909 and 1910) into *The Negro and His Music* (1925). This argument counters much of the literature that suggested that Odum abandoned his racial views once he arrived at UNC in 1920. While he projected a more tolerant view of black culture, he did not abandon his

stated that the "Negro [was] too often judged partially." He went on to mention that information about blacks was dominated by common talk and political harangue in the South,[42] and insisted that a lack of knowledge about the southern Negro only heightened the friction and hindered effective policies to curb the race problem.[43]

Odum viewed folklore studies as an important endeavor in helping the southern liberal cause to advance the mutual understanding between the races. Most important for Odum, such studies put information about the Negro race on scientific footing. Indeed, folklore studies provided substantial data about the social, economic, and cultural condition of blacks. Odum's marriage of Negro and folk background studies was founded on his "fascination by the problem of race (or more correctly, Negro) differences."[44] William B. Thomas rightly noted that Odum "favored [the] scientific study of race not only as a means to help whites understand differentials in the society, but for them to appreciate the evolution of differentials."[45] Animating his view of folklore studies was

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pseudo-scientific view of race (traits and characteristics) used to promote gradualist perspective on race-relations.

[42] Howard W. Odum, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro Race in Southern Towns*, 13.

[43] His positivism was captured in a review of his second dissertation in the *New York Times*, July 31, 1910. The article begins with a quotation from Odum: "More study and less discussion is what is demanded by the negro problem."

[44] See Guy B. Johnson's "Introductory Note" to The Negro and Race-Relations section in *Folk, Region, and Society: Selected Papers of Howard W. Odum*, ed. Katherine Jocher, Guy Johnson, George L. Simpson, and Rupert B. Vance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 4. Johnson noted, "Odum was always fascinated by the problem of race differences—or differentials, as he preferred to call them." In his own words Odum asserted, "This distinction (between differences and differentials) is of the utmost importance and assumes at once that races instead of being inherently different are group products of differentials due to the cumulative power of the physical and folk regional cultural environment." Again, Odum lacked sound arguments and formulation of concepts. Yet my chapter argues that Odum never moved beyond the inherent racial differences that proposed his concept of racial differentials did. See Odum, "The Negro in 1950: A Forecast" (1939) republished in *Folk, Region and Society*, 45.

[45] William B. Thomas, "Conservative Currents in Howard Washington Odum's Agenda for Social Reform in Southern Race Relations, 1930-1936," *Phylon,* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1984), 125

his investment in the cultural dynamic that partly constituted racial differences. His fascination with the cultural differences of black southerners, in particular, was shot through with his interest in their "folk-mind and feelings." He asserted that "the heart and soul of the real people are unknown, science is deprived of a needed contribution."[46] What does he mean by the "heart and soul of the people?" The folk-mind and feelings centered on distinct instincts or impulses of the Negro race.

In Odum's eyes, no cultural entity rivaled the "Negro Church" in the display of the so-called folk mind and feelings unique to the southern Negro. It was as a result of his early field study of black towns and neighborhoods in Layfette County, Mississippi and Newton County, Georgia, while a graduate student at the University of Mississippi that he began to understand the importance of black religion to the scientific study of race. After his field expeditions to various prayer and class meetings, marching services, love feasts, and Sunday services he concluded that the "function of the negro Church [was] rather to give expression and satisfaction to social and religious emotions than to direct moral conduct…"[47] Odum described how "many older negroes may be seen with heads resting backwards---sometimes forward----and their eyes closed as they sing vigorously their favorite songs." He goes on to question, "Is it surprising, then, that after a day's hard work,..that he finds sweet rest in some melodious songs and rhythmic verses as he rests his body in the pew?"[48]

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[46] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs,* 8.

[47] Odum, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, 54.

[48] Ibid, 83.

For Odum, the folk mind and inner consciousness of the race constituted the "Negro Church."[49] In his fieldwork, the Negro church was depicted as an environment in which blacks freely expressed their so-called 'natural selves' unencumbered by outside authorities or surveillance. It was the order of the church services, especially the Sunday afternoon services that he felt was organized around the natural traits of the Negro. According to Guy Johnson, Odum replicated the often stated argument that the negro church was "peculiarly Negro because it was managed by Negroes themselves…" Beyond the management by Negroes, his belief in the existence of distinct racial characteristics and traits placed the Negro church in a "class of its own." His concentration on the folk mind and feelings bolstered the conclusion that racial instincts or impulses were chiefly responsible for the formation of the Negro church beyond mere historical accidents, e.g. Jim Crow segregation laws. Odum asserted that folk science was meant to assess the natural instincts and impulses believed to be responsible for the emotional element or feeling-attitudes within old-time spirituals, lined hymns, shout-songs, unlearned sermons, and public prayers, especially during the "satisfying services." According to Odum, the "revelation of emotions which the Negro shows in his singing… manifests the reality of his religion."[50] At bottom, the value in the study of black religion lay in the close examination of the natural traits that governed the cultural practices of southern black masses.

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[49] Odum used the typical designation the "Negro Church." In his second dissertation, Odum stressed that majority of the southern Negroes were Baptists, Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal, and Colored Methodist Episcopal. Black Baptists still outnumbered other denominations. Odum, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Condition of the Negro Race in Southern Towns*, 55

[50] Howard Odum, *The Social and Mental Traits*, 54.

The emotional element that permeated every aspect of the Negro church was due to the importance blacks placed on the worship.[51] In his field observation, he documented, "the worship [was] prolonged to a later hour than among the whites."[52] The importance attributed to worship gave rise to the dominance of the " spontaneous, rhythmic and melodious" sacred songs. The dominance given to the spontaneous, rhythmic, and melodious song making captured for Odum the seemingly 'spectacular' and 'personal' dynamic in religion that was designed to simply satisfy inner cravings and basic needs.[53] It was the dominant expressive form in black Protestantism that to his mind best captured the unique mental operations characteristic of the black natural self.[54] He asserted, "The singing with its results is the most satisfying and agreeable part of the worship to the Negro nature. It satisfies his social wants and relieves to some extent his childlike psycho-physical cravings." In his general observation of services and gatherings in the Negro church, Odum noted that the tunes from the sacred songs "together with the feeling-attitude which is unconsciously his, and the satisfaction which he obtains from

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[51] He noted that the Negroes' "worship [was] music to his soul." He also noted that the order of the Sunday service was "singing, prayer---many songs and a number of prayers,---the reading of the scripture, lesson, and sermon by the preacher, prayer and singing, collection, [and] benediction." Ibid, 59.

[52] Odum, *The Social and Mental Traits*, 59. He also noted that the "preaching begins twenty to forty minutes later" in the black church than the white church.

[53] Odum remarked, "The singing begins slowly and with time-honored regularity; the effect made by voices joining in successively is agreeable. With tenor and bass and varied voices, the chorus-like song is pleasing and satisfying. . But in a short time, apparently unable to resist the impulse to give their feelings fully sway, their voices fall into that rhythmical swing peculiar to the Negroes and all measures alike become stately. Ibid, 645.

[54] Odum asserted, "In general the Negro's song will characterize his natural self wherever he sings or hears it sung; he is loath to give it up." Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Music*, 26. This same sentence about the intersection between song and natural self was reprinted originally from Odum's second dissertation in his discussion of the leader who lined the hymns. Odum, *The Social and Mental Traits*. 65.

the singing of his songs, puts church music among the negroes into a class of its own."[55] The combination of the dominant rhythms, melodious expression, and throbbing instincts also extended to the chanted sermons and long-winded prayers. He remarked that the "preaching, praying… and with it shouting, and unity of Negro worship—perfection of rhythmic sing-song---these, with the throbbing instinct of the people, make the Negro music what it is."[56] Odum noted that the same rhythms and the plaintive feelings in the Negro folk religious songs and spirituals were featured in the prayers. According to Odum, it was the second part of prayer that captured the "rhythmic pathos" typical of the southern Negro. He asserted, "the second part consists of the rising fervor and climax." He goes on to state, "the voice of the speaker trembles as if he were too full of emotional conflicts for further utterance"[57] The rhythmic pathos in the prayers were expressed when a deacon was acknowledging the divinity of God: "Most holy fadder, besides thee we know no other names where by we can be saved."[58]

III The Origins of Odum's Folk Concept

Unfortunately Odum's account of the natural instincts that constituted the folk-mind and feelings were underdeveloped and rudimentary. All his purported scientific neologism regarding the folk-mind e.g. feeling attitudes, throbbing instincts, inner consciousness, and psychophysical child cravings lacked explanation and precision. Contemporary scholars often discuss Odum's transition to a more liberal appreciation of black cultures by the 1920s, as demonstrated in his interpretation of old-time spirituals

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[55] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs,* 23. Odum used the same sentence from his second dissertation, *The Social and Mental Traits*, 62.

[56] Odum and Johnson, *The Negro and His Music*, 23. Again, reprinted in his dissertation, *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, 67.

[57] Ibid, 68-9.

[58] Ibid.

and hymns sung in the church services. Often ignored was his persistent appeal to the natural instincts and impulses unique to the so-called folk mind of the southern Negroes during his more "liberal years" at UNC. While he personally abandoned his view of the inherited inferiority of blacks by the 1920s, he never could rid himself of the biological framework that shaped his early thought about black life. Behind what scholars interpret as his gradual appreciation of black southern workers, through folklore research, was his belief in the distinctive racial traits responsible for the formation of black religious cultures in particular. In this sense, Odum's notion of the folk mind in the religious practices of the southern Negro was a product of the pre-World War I evolutionary psychology and sociology that shaped his intellectual trajectory until his death in 1954. The designation of the pre-World War I intellectual environment captured how American social scientists after Darwin incorporated the biological evolutionary framework into their study of human mentality (or culture) and society. Intellectual historian Michael O'Brien observes that although "Odum was chronologically considered a second generation sociologist, he was intellectually a survivor of the first."[59] Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Odum never hesitated to highlight and vaguely mention prewar social scientists e.g. Wilhelm Wundt, Franklin H. Giddings, William Sumner, and Gustav Ratzenhofer in his discussion of black folk cultures and the overall folkways of the South.[60] The influence of prewar psychologists and sociologists on Odum was in their merger of the biological and social realm, and the importance placed on interior mental traits (e.g. instincts) in the genesis of human and group behaviors. His view of folk

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[59] Michael O' Brien, *The Idea of the American South, 1920-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 37.

[60] By the 30s, Odum relied on these prewar social scientists in his shift to folk sociology.

evolved out of a preoccupation with the elementary instinctual nature that defined prewar social sciences. And Odum's usage of "folk mind" was part of the prewar social sciences examination of the animal, child and primitive to chart the ancestral past in the evolution of modern humans and societies. With folk psychology and folkways, the correlation between folk and instinct theory that Odum adopted in black southern religion was in vogue in American (and German) intellectual life before the "Great War."

Odum developed his notion of the folk mind of the southern Negro "masses or commoners" while a doctoral student in the psychology department at Clark University, between 1908-1909, under G. Stanley Hall. It was at Clark University and thanks to the broader American intellectual climate that Odum deepened his understanding of the importance of the psychological domain in social thought and consequently progressive reform.[61] Under the advisement of Hall, it was no surprise that Odum would write a dissertation on religion and music to understand the Negro's "natural self." While reading Hall's massive two-volume work on adolescence, Odum came across a line: "music [was] the language of the feelings as speech [was] of the intellect, and the theme of by far most music of the world is either love or religion." Hall would further write, "song and hymns have always been one of the potent aphrodisiacs of religious affection, and will remain so as long as man…. [has] emotion[s]."[62] Interestingly, Odum's view of the folk mind dominant in Negro religion developed alongside his advisor's pioneering work in "child-study movement" beginning in the late nineteenth century. Odum's folk-mind was

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[61] Jeffrey Sklansky, *Socializing the Psyche: The Fall of Political Economy and The Rise of Social Psychology in the U.S., 1830* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Columbia University, 1996)

[62] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence and Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 298.

a byproduct of the post-Darwinian dominant trend where Hall and others were preoccupied with the mental evolution of the human species in order to foreground their understanding of modern human and social behaviors.

Born in 1844 in a rural village in Western Massachusetts, Hall was the first person to be awarded a doctorate in psychology in America under William James at Harvard College in 1878.[63] It was his many scholarly and administrative duties, e.g. building experimental laboratories, establishing academic journals, organizing professional societies, and training graduate students that helped to transform psychology into a legitimate science of the mind in America. He argued, "any truly scientific psychology must be first of all biological." He furthered surmised that the mind was coextensive with life."[64] Yet it was Hall's genetic psychology that set the stage for his graduate student's examination of the folk interior worlds of the southern Negro masses. Known as the "Darwin of the mind," Hall's genetic psychology eschewed theological and philosophical metaphysics and situated the human "mind" on the natural grounds of the "unconscious, instinctive, prehuman or animal traits" inherited from a longer ancestral past. He asserted, "As in the prenatal and infant stage man hears from the remoter forebears back perhaps to primitive organisms, now the later and higher ancestry [modern humans] takes up the burden of the song of life, and the voices of our extinct and perhaps forgotten, and our later, and more human ancestry are heard in the soul."[65] The reference to the "ancestral past" was the grounds on which to understand the hereditary traits

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[63] He was also the first American to study with the father of psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, in his laboratory in Leizpig, Germany in the 1880.He was also responsible for Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's first (and last) visit to the United States for a conference at Clark University at the same time Odum was a student there in 1909.

[64] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, 62.

[65] Ibid, 70-1

recapitulated in different stages of human development, e.g. adolescence. At the heart of his Neo-Lamarckian genetic psychology was the maxim that "we really know things only when we trace their development from the farthest beginning through all their stages to maximal maturity and decay."[66] Hall turned his psychological gaze to the child and adolescent, and offered a romantic narrative underneath his biological naturalism that celebrated their emotional vitality and uninhibited imagination.

By the time Odum arrived at Clark University, Hall had already been at work with placing primary and secondary education on a par with the scientific knowledge about hereditary traits recapitulated in child and youth development. His genetic psychology was a response to what he believed to be the "over-schooling" within the broader over-civilization (i.e. "city-fication") of American life that suffocated the "life of feeling that [had] its prime in youth." The prescribed anecdote for the "over-schooling" and larger over-civilization of American industrial life, especially among the vulnerable and naturally inebriated adolescent, was to develop educational programs and curriculum that simply allowed "mother-nature' to work for a more perfect education. Hall stated that the "guardians of the young should strive first of all to keep out of nature's way."[67] It was in context where Hall stressed a program of "natural education" that Odum developed a positivistic orientation where he would continuously privilege the natural in social and political reform, particularly in the South. More important, it was Hall's view that education (e.g. dramatic reenactments, sports and recess, social interactions) must be a safe haven for cultivating the "life of feelings" and, more specifically, the ancestral inheritance of the instincts (or feeling-attitudes) of both children and adolescents that

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[66] Ibid, 62

[67] I borrowed this quote from Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: Psychologist As Prophet* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972), 310.

inspired his student to center his notion of folk-mind in Negro southern religions on the theory of instincts.

Hall's romantic preoccupation with the emotional nature of children and youth was inseparable from the entire mental history or evolution of the race. The emotional development of the child or adolescent could only be understood, he insisted, within the broader contours of the human race. He stated that the instinct feelings of "each person [were] broader, deeper, and more comprehensive of the traits of the whole race." Since his genetic psychology privileged the examination of the mind (or soul) in the past over and against future-oriented Christian soteriology, he felt that the emotional traits inherited in adolescence were part of the phylogenetic or ancestral heritage. It was Hall's post-Darwinian view of the phylogenetic and ancestral past in the recapitulation of mental traits in children and adolescence that highlighted the intersection between historical and genetic psychology. Inspired by Wilhelm Wundt's historical or folk psychology, Hall's attention to the "ancestral record" expanded scientific data of the modern race to include animals, children, adolescents, primitive peoples, and folk beliefs.[68] Hall argued that the " animal, child and savage were closer to the adult mind" than usually depicted in the Victorian imagination.[69] The reference to the ancestral past—animals and primitive races—to account for the primal registers of the modern race ultimately colored Odum's perceptions of the inner-consciousness of the Negro race. Unlike Hall, Odum maintained the separation between the black-white cultures, and did not study southern black culture

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[68] Dorothy A. Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), 64.

[69] Hall noted that an obstacle to genetic psychology was the "disposition to regard animals as well as defectives, savages, and children as too remote from the life of adult culture to shed much light upon the mature mind." Hall, *Adolescence*, 51

to account for the whole human mind and society. Like Hall, Odum painted a romantic portrait of the excitable nature of blacks who, he said, were psychologically prone to ecstatic forms of religious worship and rituals.

More important, Odum was captivated by Hall's extension of the adolescence to the "arrested development" of different primitive racial groups (e.g. African Americans, Asian and Native American peoples). Cultural historian Jackson Lears notes, "Hall restated the common analogy between the child and the race in an influential formula: ontogency recapitulates phylogency." Lears furthered argues, "school children should repeat the experiences and emotions of their primitive ancestors."[70] In his last chapter entitled, "Adolescent Races and Their Treatment" in the second volume of *Adolescence*, Hall

noted that the "primitive peoples [had] a right to linger in the paradise of childhood."[71] Combining Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Jean Jacques Rousseau's romanticism, Hall further elucidated the "paradise of childhood" in that the primitive races "live a life of feeling, emotion, [and] impulse." Odum relied on Hall's view of the paradise of childhood in the adolescent races to explain the folk mind and subsequently the mental operations displayed in black southern Protestantism. Although Odum discarded the notion of arrested development to explain the natural inferiority of the southern Negro, by the time he arrived at Chapel Hill (as I pointed out in the last section), he was insisting on the child and primitive traits of feeling, emotion, and impulse in his explication of black southerners.

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[70] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: AntiModernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 147.

[71] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, 649

The fascination with the child and primeval instincts of race extended beyond Hall and genetic psychology and into discussion of social groups. By the time he obtained his doctorate in psychology and enrolled for a second doctorate in sociology at Columbia University, the ancestral instinct theory permeated early sociological study of human organizations. Unlike Hall's romantic vitalism, sociologists such as Herbert Spencer interrogated certain instincts and impulses to understand lower forms of social organization. Odum picked up from the first generational sociologists that social and group organizations, e.g. the Negro church, were the result of primeval instincts. Published in 1906, laissez-faire sociologist William Graham Sumner's *Folkways* used bestial and ancestral instincts to understand mass group behaviors (i.e. habits or customs) governing life-policies or social welfare.[72] Sumner asserted, "that all the life of human beings, in all ages and stages of culture, is primarily controlled by a vast mass of folkways handed down from the earliest existence of the race, having the nature of the ways of other animals."[73] Relying on ethnological study of primitive non-Western groups, Sumner defined folkways as the bestial and primeval instincts that were elevated into "mores" in modern society.[74] He asserted, "When the elements of truth and right are developed into doctrines of welfare, the folkways are raised to another plane." Similar to the tribal societies in New Guinea, the "masses" were most vulnerable to purely folk

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[72] "The masses were synonymous with crowd or herd logics based on the unconscious, spontaneous and uncoordinat[ion]." William Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1940),19. *Folkways* was originally published in 1906.

[73] Ibid, 4

[74] Sumner asserted, "When this conviction as to the relation to welfare is added to the folkways they are converted into mores, and by virtue of the philosophical and ethical element added to them, they win utility and importance and become the source of the science and the art of living." William Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1940), 3.

instinctual and impulsive life just like animals.[75] Yet, it was Odum's graduate advisor Franklin H. Giddings who also showed him the role of instinct theory in the formation of human and social groups. Giddings asserted, "Our conduct toward those whom we feel to be most like ourselves is instinctively and rationally different from our conduct toward others, whom we believe to be less like ourselves…it is precisely the consciousness of kind, that, in actual life, continually interferes with the theoretically perfect operation of the economic, political, or the religious motives."[76] While Odum recognized the economic and political, he was inspired by Giddings' concept of the "consciousness of kind." Gidding's consciousness of kind underscored that individuals were naturally part of a group due to innate instincts. For Odum, the "consciousness of kind,"— feeling-attitudes and instincts were the primary factor in the formation of the "Negro church." Guy Johnson argued that "Odum found that the Negro church was peculiarly Negro because it was managed by the Negro themselves; that is, racial traits differ in degree as well as in kind."[77]

Odum's attention to religion in the study of the instinctive religion of black southerners was also very much a product of the scientific climate before World War I. By the early twentieth century, especially with William James' publication of *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1911), there was an attempt to merge the study of religion with the natural and social sciences. Religion was scientifically valuable for what it revealed about human behaviors. Before Odum arrived at Columbia University to undertake his second

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[75] Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals,* 45.

[76] Theodore Abel, "The Significance of the Concept of Consciousness of Kind," *Social Forces*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Oct., 1930), 2.

[77] Guion and Guy Johnson, *The Church and the Race Problem in the United States: A Research Memorandum,* unpublished, Sept 1, 1940, 279.

doctorate in sociology, Fredrick M. Davenport published his dissertation, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals,* at Columbia in 1905. Building on Giddings' consciousness of kind (or "sympathetic like-mindedness"), Davenport suggested that religious revivals underscored the psychic and physiological laws and processes by which the "crowd" or "sympathetic popular movements" occur. Religious revivals highlighted the crowd or herd mind where individuals were "governed by emotions and imitation, and lacked inhibitory control" for sound and reflective judgment. Although many of the first-generation social scientists had renounced their parents Protestantism, they found creative ways to integrate religious faith with their "secular" temperament.[78] Odum no longer ascribed to his mother's southern Methodism.[79] Hall renounced his parents' stringent puritanical evangelicalism, yet he valued religious behaviors (especially conversion experiences), the passion, Hebrew Bible and Catholic rituals in so far that they offered insights into "human nature" and stages of development.[80] His valuing of religion actually led to the founding of the *Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* in 1904. The *Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* helped to spearhead the

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[78] Dorothy A. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, 53-97.

[79] Odum's mother was the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner who lost his wealth and property after the Civil War. He promise in art and aesthetics gave way to a stern religious orientation and hardship. Odum asserted, "She sang almost incessantly and danced and played with rare imagination. Then 1860 and the war….The song of the little girl turned plaintive, nature became fields and rows of cotton and corn. She grew up; pleasure was translated into service, religion became a merciless tyrant demanding pleasure for itself. Love of Jesus was substituted for love of youth, the beauty of the spirit transcended the beauty of the body. Then marriage and the family, many children, three dead, and the love of the beautiful was translated into the pictures of the promised land; aspiration turned toward meeting the children on the golden shore; continued hardships, after-the-war poverty holding on, always frustration on all aspiration for the beautiful. Then typhoid fever, interpreted as punishment from God because of her secret aspirations for beauty and companionship." See: Odum, *An American Epoch: Southern Portraiture In The National Picture* (New York: Henry and Holt, 1930), 57.

[80] For a wonderful treatment of Hall's religious biography, see: Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist As Prophet*

emergence of psychology of religion unique to America. He recommended that religious studies be incorporated into the child and adolescent curriculum in order to properly facilitate evolution, especially in the reenactment of the ancestral and primitive traits such as passion, lust and superstition. According to intellectual historian Dorothy A. Ross: "On some level, Hall believed that religion served as a mechanism to sublimate the instincts and impulses, especially primitive sexual desires of adolescents, into higher and safe forms of excitement, passions and dependence."[81] Sumner felt that the folkways --- desires, irrationality, and feelings--- were founded on the religious and aleatory elements of the premodern world.[82]

IV. Guy B. Johnson's Challenge

By the 1930s, Odum transitioned to a folk sociology in order to critically account for the conflict between the southern folkways and the national stateways and technicways. A knowledge of southern folkways allowed for effective regional and governmental planning in the South. Yet central to his conception of folk sociology and regionalism was his field study of southern Negroes. His student George Simpson argued that his study of Negro folk songs helped him to fully understand that "folk culture was the root of society."[83] Yet Odum's attraction to natural and primeval instincts designed to explicate Negro folk religion and culture and substantiate racial differentiation was outdated in the professional social scientific community by the Depression (Chapter 2). In the IRSS, Odum's students and colleagues exerted their energy on the social and

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[81] Ibid, 330.

[82] Sumner resigned from his ministerial vocation at thirty-two, in 1872, and, like many young men, dedicated himself to scientific naturalism. See: Bruce Curtis, *William Graham Sumner* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1981), 25-42.

[83] George Simpson, "Introductory Note" in *Folk, Region, and Society: Selected Papers of Howard W. Odum*, eds. Katherine Jocher, Guy B. Johnson, George L. Simpson, and Rupert B. Vance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 220.

political economy of the south. Chapel Hill sociologist Rupert Vance sought to focus on the cotton economy in his explication of southern behaviors and consequently race-relations. In the realm of religion and culture, Odum's most silent and mild-mannered critic was his student and colleague, Guy B. Johnson.

Born in Caddo Mills, Texas at the turn of the century, Johnson arrived in the Carolina Piedmont region as the first graduate research assistant at the IRSS in 1924. Before he enrolled in the doctorate department of sociology, he received his master's degree in sociology at the University of Chicago. He was exposed to the study of race under America's premiere sociologist in race-relations, Robert E. Park. Under Park, Johnson wrote his master's thesis on the Ku Klux Klan. Johnson published parts of his master's thesis in UNC's academic journal, *Social Forces* in 1923. By the time he co-authored *Negro Southern Songs*, Johnson never agreed with Odum's instinctual theory of race. Johnson mainly served as editor for Odum. Due to his emphasis on black culture within the race-relations paradigm, Johnson never ascribed to the idea that black and white religions and cultures were drastically different. He felt that emotional traits were not a good place to defend the uniqueness of the religious expressions of the southern Negro.

In his 1927 dissertation entitled, "A Study of the Musical Talent of the American Negro," Johnson theoretically separated himself from his advisor's research on the folk Negro. Using the Seashore musical test, Johnson studied over three thousand elementary, secondary, and college black students in the Carolinas and Virginia.[84] In his measurement of pitch, intensity, time, rhythm, and memory, Johnson argued against the popular

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[84] The Seashore Music Test scientifically measured musical aptitude. The test was developed by its namesake, Carl E. Seashore, in 1919. His protégée, Milton Metfessel developed the phonophotography test. This test measured musical sound waves on "film."

sentiment (and that of his advisor, Odum!) in particular, that Negroes had an unusual natural or innate musical talent. Among the adults, Johnson argued that Negroes [were] neither superior nor inferior to whites in musical talent."[85] As a host for anthropologist Bronislaw Malinoskwi during his visit to the Chapel Hill campus in the mid-twenties, Johnson was influenced by Malinoskwi's method of functionalism in anthropology. In his fieldwork among Negro steel drillers and railroad workers, Johnson said that the question of whether John Henry was a fact or myth was irrelevant. The folk hero John Henry was real due to his purpose and function among the black working "common man." The folktale boosted the working population's egos amid the lack of "notoriety for their hard work." Johnson argued, "[John Henry's] superstrength, his grit, his endurance, and his martyrdom appeal to something fundamental in the heart of the common man." He further asserted, "John Henry stands for something which the pick-and-shovel Negro idolizes---brute strength."[86] He specifically challenged Odum's argument that the unique folk mind (racial traits) constituted Negro spirituals and wider religious cultures. Johnson's used his folklore research in the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) study of the black yeoman community in St. Helena Island, South Carolina, to launch his challenge to Odum's perspective on the Negro folk spirituals.[87] The objective of the study of Negroes was to investigate the effects of the Penn School on the supposedly remote and isolated black community in the Sea Island. Studying folk cultures among the black farmers and nurses, Johnson argued that their spirituals were "derived" from the Scotch-Irish influenced white spirituals popular during the revival period in the 19th century

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85 Guy B. Johnson, "Recent Contributions to the Study of American Negro Songs," 83.

86 Guy B. Johnson, *John Henry: Tracking Down A Negro Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 142.

87 He also challenged African survivals championed by Melville Herskovits.

(chapter 2).[88] For Johnson, Negro folk spirituals in the supposedly isolated region were not the result of racial traits (or African survivals). Rather it was the result of the acculturation of blacks due to the "bi-racial" religious contexts at the height of the evangelical revivals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At times, he was closer to Vanderbilt's George Pullen Jackson and argued that the black spirituals derived from the white spirituals. In a review of Jackson's *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, Johnson launched his argument about the comparison between white and black spirituals, concluding "that the Negro spirituals [were] borrowed outright from the white spirituals."[89] Historian Carter G. Woodson and ethnomusicologist George Herzog completely disagreed with Johnson and Jackson's assessment.

Johnson felt that the study of American religion(s) had exposed a fallacy of race traits that overlooked the interracial context in which black Protestantism was formed. Odum's emphasis on unique racial instincts and impulses contributed to the fallacy in the study of black religions. In his later work with the Gunnar Myrdal-Carnegie Corporation of the Negro in the mid and late '30s, Johnson used his research memorandum to revisit Odum's notion of the folk mind in the independent Negro church. Johnson felt that Odum's instinct theory of black Protestantism overlooked the history of the interracial camp meetings and white Protestant evangelicals (e.g. Methodist and Holiness) who also subscribed to a highly ecstatic religious orientation. Instead, Johnson argued that the ecstatic forms of religious orientation had nothing to do with racial instincts and impulses but social and economic environment. According to Johnson, Odum's perpetuation of the

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[88] Lawerence Levine challenges the "derivative school" for ignoring the African elements in the spirituals that were syncretized with the European forms. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 19-29.

[89] Guy Benton Johnson, "Review: White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands by George Pullen Jackson," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Jan., 1934), 561.

instinct theory of black religion underscored a lack of knowledge about the white and black working-class religions in American society. He asserted, "Although Odum's description of Negro religion worship [were] faithful accounts, he neglect[ed] to emphasize the similarities to lower class or outmoded religious patterns among whites."[90] In the end, Johnson felt that independent Negro churches followed their white counterparts. His preference for examining black religion within the race-relations paradigm was part of a wider racial liberal contingent that included Charles S. Johnson and Niles Newbell Puckett (Chapter 2).

Conclusion

Odum was instrumental in spearheading a white southern liberal contingent in the first half of the twentieth century. His southern liberalism was defined by his desire to provide a sympathetic, patient and intimate knowledge of the South. He thought his northern colleagues' call for reforming the so-called backwards American South was futile because they lacked an inside knowledge of the American South. Odum believed that an understanding of the black and white folk cultures was important to fixing the race problem in the South. He was a thoroughgoing positivist. Yet his preference for describing these so-called deeply ensconced racial traits in black folk religion prevented him from directly challenging de jure segregation in the South. In this sense, his view of folk religion actually appeased white segregationists. His work on black folk religion only supported the speculative logic of the natural differences of the races that segregationists used to justify de jure segregation in the South. His effort to reform the American South was incongruent with his belief in racial differentials. In the end, his

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[90] Guion Johnson and Guy Johnson, 'The Church and the Race Problem…" 361.

perspective on black folk religion exposed the pitfalls of southern white liberalism in the twentieth century.

Chapter 2

Folk Belief, Racial Liberalism, and the Cultural Deficit Hypothesis: The Roles of Charles S. Johnson and Fisk University in the Study of Black Peasants

Barely settled in his lavish Manhattan apartment, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, the newly appointed researcher for the Carnegie study of the "Negro Problem," began to tour the Southern regions of the United States beginning on September 10, 1938.[1] Due to the flood of rural southern blacks migrating into the urban and commercial centers, the Carnegie President, Fredrick Keppel, felt that a firsthand observation of the rural South was a crucial step to comprehending the "Negro problem," now viewed as a national rather than simply a local issue. Writing to Keppel about the southern tour, Myrdal agreed that despite the time constraints, "the experience, however, was necessary," for "without it our later studies should have had no concrete points at which to be fixed."[2] In the economist's eyes, understanding the racial and economic patterns in rural South was essential to comprehending America's Negro Problem.[3]

Myrdal and his trusted Swedish colleague, Richard Sterner, traveled with the assistant director of the Rockefeller General Education Board, Jackson Davis, who not only drove the Swedes in his Buick for the two-month Virginia-Arkansas tour but had organized the entire southern tour, which intended to grapple with the Negro Problem by conversing with local and

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[1] Gunnar Myrdal, "Memorandum to Fredrick Keppel, " January 28, 1939. *The Negro in America: Research Memorandum For Use In The Preparation of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma,* Microfilm.

[2] Ibid, p.3.

[3] To help him understand the South, Myrdal added southern liberal social scientists Guy Benton Johnson to his core staff. Johnson was the folk social scientists and the "Negro expert" at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Myrdal also consulted with other social scientists, such as E. Franklin Frazier, W.E.B. Du Bois, Melville Herskovits, Ruth Benedict, Arthur Rapier, and many others. In this sense, Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* was a collaborative work of racial liberalism. To focus on the collorative work of the Myrdal-Carnegie project puts me at odds with parts of Walter Jackson's claim on the uniqueness of Myrdal's thesis.

professional southern leaders and educators. However, the Swedish welfare economists were more interested in visiting the "plantation fields and farms, coal and steel mines, textile mills, tobacco factories, bars and pool halls," in order to obtain an intimate knowledge of the Negro Problem through the everyday experiences of the "black masses or common people." According to Myrdal, the "workers and farmers...were so amazed by the unique opportunity of meeting somebody from overseas that they talked, so we thought, with less restraint and conscious self-control than they were accustomed to do."[4] Through conversing in this informal and therefore unrestrained way with low-wage black workers, Myrdal could observe much more closely than if he had simply talked to professional leaders and educators the actual social experiences of blacks plagued by ill-health, poor housing, and overall poverty that were not "compatible with any modern concepts of a minimum health [ly] standard" of living.[5] In a letter to a colleague, the Swedish outsider communicated that he was overwhelmed by "these sick, undernourished masses of people and their depleted soil, and poorly-conserved natural resources."[6]

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[4] Myrdal, "Memorandum to Fredrick P, Keppel," Jan., 28, 1939, *The Negro In America, Research Memorandum For Use In The Preparation of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma*, Microfilm.

[5] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*: *The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 25th Edition. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. Myrdal's Swedish colleague, economist Richard Sterner lifted up the "minimum standard" as the best approach to understand the living conditions of persons or groups living in extreme poverty characterized by a lack of "vitamin and mineral content in diet (malnutrition), poor housing, and medical care. Sterner asserted, "[a] lthough there is still a certain arbitrariness about the whole concept of a minimum standard of living, it nevertheless has so much of an objective content that it constitutes a highly valuable instrume nt for an appraisal of actual living conditions [9]." See: Richard Sterner, *The Negro's Share: A Study of Income, Consumption, Housing, and Public Assistance* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1943). This publication was an extension of his research with the Myrdal project.

[6] Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering & Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 90. Jackson asserts, "Davis' key contacts on the trip were white officials in charge of Negro education in various states, and Myrdal's access to the black community was initially through black school principals and other professionals and through members of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Myrdal and Sterner soon grew distrustful of Davis' guidance and tired of hearing conservative, middle-class Negro spokesman. They sought out sharecroppers, visited bars and nightclubs, and talked with blacks of all classes." For more background on the different receptions of the Myrdal-Carnegie publication,

Myrdal and Sterner's field observations of these particular low-wage black workers and farmers were linked to the broader American context in which the rural southern economy and customs were under the national microscope. The situations of the sick, undernourished masses of black workers were deeply tied to the antiquated staple-crop economy, low-wage tenancy and credit system, soil erosion, overproduction, and overpopulation that constituted the southern economy during the New Deal Era.

A couple of months after Myrdal and Sterner journeyed through this southern region in the fall of 1938, Franklin Roosevelt embarked on his own southern tour to persuade southerners to vote for New Deal candidates over and against the "dangerous leadership" of the Southern Democrats. On August 11, 1938 in Barnsville, Georgia, Roosevelt declared that the South was America's number one economic problem. The desperate second-term President noted, "For we have an economic unbalance in the Nation as a whole, due to this very condition in the South itself."[7]– While Roosevelt based his knowledge of the Southern economy mainly on the relatively limited federal Report of the Economic Problem of the South, Myrdal relied on a host of federal and census reports and social scientific monographs as well as on the interviews he conducted in person to understand the substandard living conditions of agricultural communities and the overall rural Southern economy from the late 1920s to the 1940s.

Myrdal's preoccupation with black low-wage and impoverished communities and their "minimum living standards" was part of an emerging new racial liberal front and "intellectual consensus" in America during the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, a consensus that historian

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see: Donald Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

[7] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at Barnesville, Georgia," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1938, Volume: The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 464.

Harvard Sitkoff described as establishing, "that race did not determine intelligence or personality, and that environment, not genes, most influenced human behavior."[8] In his American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy in America (1944), Myrdal had joined the racial liberal chorus by taking as the starting-point for his study of the Negro Problem the assumption that "the basic human traits in the Negro are not inherently much different from other people."[9] Therefore, these liberal social scientists focused on the substandard living conditions of southern black low-income working and poor communities to underscore the significance of the socioeconomic environment, such as wages, employment, public relief, health and mortality, and education, in determining racial cultures and behaviors. The emphasis on the social environment was designed to appeal to the federal government and prompt it to intervene in racial matters to ensure that blacks had a stake in American democracy. While many liberal social scientists were wedded to gathering quantitative data to bolster their claims regarding the substandard living conditions of the black lower-class families and communities, they were also invested in the study of behaviors and personalities to articulate the racial and economic dimensions of culture. Historian Alice O'Connor rightly contended that "the more pronounced, and immediate legacy of the Great Depression for poverty knowledge was in the social scientific study of how poverty was at once a cause and a consequence of psychological depression, [and] the distinctive values associated with lower-class culture..."[10]

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[8] Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights As A National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 143. While Sitkoff is correct to note that Franz Boas cultural anthropology was in part responsible for rejecting the biological foundations of race and the linear evolutionary model, it is also important to recognize that the black and leftists political movements contributed to the "intellectual consensus." Sitkoff is certainly aware of this fact.

[9] Gunnar Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, p. ixxv.

[10] Alice O'Connor, *Poverty-Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and The Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001), pp. 55.

This widespread investment in elucidating the cultures and personalities of the black lower-class compelled Myrdal to argue that the "Negro culture was a distorted development, or pathological condition, of the general American culture."[11] The discourse of pathology and cultural lag was part of the cultural deficit hypothesis that defined the legacy of racial liberalism first developed in the first half of the twentieth-century.

It was therefore no surprise that to fully understand the so-called cultural behavioral deficit of the black southern worker and migrant, Myrdal traveled to Nashville, Tennessee to consult with a distinguished sociologist, Charles S. Johnson. Throughout the race-relations study, Myrdal would maintain a regular correspondence with Johnson, the faculty members, and graduate students of the Social Science Department at historically black Fisk University.[12] Johnson was at the forefront of racial liberalism and espoused the cultural deficit hypothesis of black rural populations, whom he called America's folk or peasantry class. As this chapter will demonstrate, his investigation of folk beliefs in the "plantation church" played a major role in his articulation of the cultural deficit hypothesis. Born in 1893, Johnson had personally relinquished the Protestant faith of his childhood. Yet he understood the importance of studying religion to fully comprehend the folk mentalities and poor economic conditions of "black peasants." At the time Myrdal visited Nashville in November of 1938, Johnson had transformed Fisk' into a premier department for race relations research in the rural South. In the late 1920s to the 1940s, the Julius Rosenwald Foundation, the Farm Service Agency, the Library of Congress, and a host

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[11] Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, p.926.

[12] Myrdal visited Johnson and other members in the social science department at Fisk University after coming from the Human Welfare Conference in Birmingham, Alabama. Very fond of Johnson and the Fisk, Myrdal invited Johnson to participate in planning conference for the comprehensive study with his "core staff" in Asbury Park, New Jersey on April 23-28, 1939. For more on this planning meeting, see: Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience*, pp. 88-134.

of other federal and philanthropic organizations consulted the expert opinions and research conclusions of Fisk social scientists about the living conditions and personalities of black southern workers in the Jim Crow South. Due to the esteemed reputation of Fisk's social science department, the Rosenwald Foundation and the American Mission Association decided to allocate funds to establish the Institute of Race relations at Fisk University in 1945. President of the Rosenwald Foundation, Edwin Embree described sociologist Johnson's success by stating that, "His department has become one of the great institutes of the country, comparable to the centers at the University of Chicago and the University of North Carolina."[13]

This chapter attends to the federal and philanthropic supported race relations studies conducted by Charles Johnson, Lewis Jones, Samuel Armstrong, and students at Fisk University and specifically to how they deployed the category of "folk" and subsequently engaged in folklore studies to capture the economic and regional dimensions of Negro cultures and behaviors that developed in the antebellum plantation culture and continued into the first half of the twentieth-century. Johnson abhorred critics who argued that America did not have a folk or peasant class like European feudalism. He argued that the term "folk" was useful to interrogate the living conditions of the rural blacks because it highlighted the cultural and psychological effects of the American plantation system and socioeconomic isolation.[14] The folk category underscored how the plantation was also a psychological condition. By focusing on the social scientific work of Johnson et al., I argue that their study of Negro folk religion helped racial liberals (like Myrdal) to identify the cultural and behavioral deficit of black peasants populations.

[13] Edwin Embree, "A Scholar and A Gentleman," in *13 Against the Odds* (New York: The Viking Press, 1944), p. 61. By placing Fisk University in the same sentence as a University of Chicago and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Embree purposively captured the national and international reputation of the field of social science and subsequently race-relations studies at Fisk University.

[14] Charles S. Johnson, *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), p. 6.

While contemporary scholars of African-American religion have rightly documented the "racial uplift" narrative that has impacted social scientists' study of Negro religion, few have paid attention to the importance of ethnographic studies of Negro religion of the folk and peasant communities in bolstering racial liberalism in their appeals to the welfare state and rejection of the biological theories of race in the 1930s and ’40s. In the end, Johnson and others studied the religious behaviors of the “Folk Negro” to illustrate an elementary stage of cultural development due to the “feudal” southern economy.

Yet it is impossible to discuss ethnographic studies of black peasants and their folk religious cultures at Fisk University without also attending to the influence of Robert Ezra Parks’ race-relations studies while Johnson was a graduate student at the University of Chicago from 1916 to 1918. After he retired from the University of Chicago, Park worked in the Social Science Department at Fisk University. In this chapter, I will also demonstrate how Park's emphasis on acculturation into modern civilization significantly impacted Johnson’s scientific investigation of black rural populations and their religious behaviors in the rural South. Park understood that race relations was an attempt to explore theoretically the organic intersections between social organization and human personality as a way to consider the possibility of racial group assimilation into American mainstream society. By teasing out the relationship between the University of Chicago and Fisk University, this chapter will demonstrate how underneath Park's race relations research was a peasant/civilized and rural/urban dichotomy that fundamentally shaped Johnson’s, the faculty’s, and students’ view of the folk religious cultural deficit of the black peasants in the plantation South.

After exploring the work of the University of Chicago and its impact on Charles

Johnson, I will discuss the emergence of the Social Science Department at Fisk University in the 1930s and 1940s. The rise of the Social Science department was largely attributed to the changing dynamic of race relations research in part prompted by philanthropists and philanthropic organizations like the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Laura Spelman Rockefeller, and the Carnegie Corporation, which were increasingly concerned about the development of black peasants' social experiences away from mainstream society, especially in the area of modern medicine and education. The implementation of modern medicine and education was a political strategy to abolish "folk" supernatural beliefs in the modern advancement of southern blacks. These foundations as well as the federal government looked to Johnson, the faculty and students at Fisk University to understand the effects of racial and class conditions on black southerners. Lastly, the ethnographic studies of what was called Negro folk religion played a crucial role for racial liberals' understanding of the psychological/behavioral dimension of race and economic conditions. Following the bi-racial origins of Folk Negro religion that Niles Newbell Puckett and Guy Johnson had proposed, Johnson and the social scientists at Fisk University looked to the experiences of Scottish immigrants and southern white lower-class persons to explain the Negro Folk religious cultures. The bi-racial view of Negro Folk religion promulgated by Johnson and racial liberal social scientists directly countered the work of Columbia University's cultural anthropologists (Chapter 3) and their attention to the "African origins" of Folk Negro Religion in the 1930s and 1940s.

II. The Rural/Urban Problem in Race Relations Studies at the University of Chicago

After completing his undergraduate degree at Virginia Union in 1916, Charles Johnson

pursued a graduate education in sociology at the University of Chicago. Johnson would join other African American scholars such as Monroe Work and Richard Wright Jr., who matriculated through the sociology department at the University of Chicago at the dawn of the twentieth century. Founded in 1892, the sociology department had early roots in the American Baptist Tradition in the Progressive Era. Before World War I, the department was filled with sociologists who were trained clergy and had deep ties to the hub of liberal Protestantism and adult education at the Chautauqua Institute in upstate New York. These liberal Protestant sociologists were Albion Small (chair), Charles Zueblin, Charles Henderson, and George Vincent. Informed by their liberal commitments to the social gospel, these Protestant sociologists wedded sociology to social work to reform the dirty streets, inadequate schools, conflict-ridden factories, rampant poverty and crime, and unsanitary slums in urban Chicago. It was the spirit of social amelioration that constituted urban Progressivism and united the Protestant sociologists with Jane Addams, John Dewey, W.I. Thomas and George Mead. Moreover the university's sociology department was affiliated with progressive organizations such as the Hull House, the Chicago Civic Club, and the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. Although Johnson and other social scientists were not affiliated with a religious body, he and others continued the Progressive spirit of social research and liberal reform in the 30s and 40s. Sociologist Mary J. Deegan asserts, "Social amelioration was the central core and thrust of the early Chicago School. It was the raison d'etre of its existence and work."[15]

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[15] For more on William Harper, John D. Rockefeller, and the founding of the University of Chicago, see Chapter 2: Chicago: The City and the University" in Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Also see: Robert E.L. Farris, *Chicago Sociology, 1920-1932* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967). Harper stressed the importance of scientific research as the University's public service to humanity. This view was partly informed by his own modern Protestant sensibilities.

This urban sociological trajectory persisted after World War I. Chicago and other urban cities were laboratories for the study of social organizations and human personalities. Martin Bulmer asserted, "The later fertility of the Chicago School under the influence of [Robert] Park and [William Issac] Thomas owed a good deal to the reform interests of a number of academicians, which created among social scientists a sense of intimacy with the city." Although the postwar sociologists continued the reform sociologists' "intimacy with the city," Chicago sociologists Robert Park, William Thomas, Ernest Burgess, and Louis Wirth desperately desired to depart from reform-oriented Protestants' views in order to plant sociology and the study of urban social problems in the fertile soil of the natural sciences rather than religious conviction.[16] One of the areas of specialization that catapulted the Chicago School's urban ecology into the national spotlight was in race-relations research. The development of the Chicago School of race relations in the interwar years was directly tied to the School's intimacy with the city; the field of race relations was the product of the School's urban sociology. While a student in the department, Johnson contributed to the race-relations division within the University of Chicago's urban sociology. He was an executive secretary and main researcher for the Chicago's Commission of Race Relations report, *The Negro In Chicago*, a direct engagement with the public controversy surrounding the "Negro Problem" in the urban and commercial districts in the U.S. Johnson's report grew out of a "clash between white people and Negroes" that resulted in the drowning of a Negro boy at the bathing-beach, sparking a three-day riot that led to the deaths

[16] According to Stow Persons, Park accredited the W.I. Thomas as the "original impetus to turn Chicago students away from social problems and reform to an intellectual and genuinely scientific interest in society and human nature. Park transformed and extended the scientific interest in society and human nature into dogma. See: Stow Persons, *Ethnic Studies at Chicago, 1905-1945, pp. 29-30.*

of twenty-three blacks and fifteen whites in 1919.[17] Beyond the riots, the Chicago School of race relations examined a host of urban problems arising from the race-problem: race-riots, broken family structure, juvenile delinquency, illegitimate children, loaferism, and poverty. The individual most responsible for the spearheading the Chicago School of race-relations was Robert Park. Coming to sociology through philosophy and journalism, Park was hired as a university lecturer in the department and taught his first seminar on the Negro in 1913. Park would have a profound impact on Johnson's study of race-relations. Johnson reflected on his encounter with Park: "It was [Park] who linked this deep and moving human concern [for delinquents, impoverished workers, prisoners, and human people on the left side of the tracks] with science and human understanding."[18]

Park's race-relations research coincided with the broader historical shifts and transitions that ushered in modern life. At the crux of Park and the Chicago School of race relations was the problem of assimilation in light of the rapidly changing social environment due to modern industrialization. Although Park stressed that sociological inquiry into race and modern life should be devoid of religious, moral and political conviction, he still projected a subjective "utopian view of modernity" to ground his American exceptionalist logic.[19] Johnson would replicate Park's utopian view of modernity in his ethnographic studies of rural black populations in the Deep South. This projected utopian view of modernity was demonstrated in Park's preoccupation with the acculturative processes of racial and ethnic groups into what he called "modern civilization" (i.e. urban life). He viewed modern civilization as an inevitable social

[17] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro In Chicago: A Study of Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 1923), xiv.
[18] Charles S. Johnson, "My Spiritual Autobiography," unpublished, Fisk University Archives, 8
[19] Dorthy Ross, *The Origins of the American Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

process that eventually led to the breakdown of cultural habits and eventually to group assimilation. Park argued, "Civilization undermine[d] the smaller cultures and by secularizing them furnishe[d] release to the individual from the [social] controls to which he [was] accustomed." Civilization threatened "minor" racial and ethnic cultural cohesion, founded on tradition and authority. Park' emphasis on the acculturation into modern civilization developed within a historical climate in which civic and philanthropic organizations supported the formation of Americanization committees, laws, courses, and research designed to curb the perceived problems associated with the influx of Southern, Eastern European immigrants, and black southern migrants during and after World War I.[20] Underneath the culture of Americanization was an anxiety that the racial diversity and subsequent tensions threatened the industrial and modern order.

Often overlooked was the influence of Booker T. Washington on Park's race-relations research. Before Park arrived at the University of Chicago, he was a publicist and ghostwriter for Washington at Tuskegee Institute from 1905-1913. It was Washington who solidified for Park the deeper acculturative and assimilative processes that the minority races would naturally undergo as a result of modernization. He helped Park to frame the race problem as a problem of assimilation into modern civilization; he defined the problem as a "race facing for the first time all the complexities of a technological civilization; all the difficulties of that race making its way in the modern world." Therefore Washington influenced Park's racial cycle theory, which understood that the Negro group and consequently other minority races through contact with the

[20] See: "Committee on Americanization: The Chicago Association of Commerce," undated, Fisk University Archives. The Chicago Association of Commerce organized the Committee on Americanization in 1918. The objective of this committee was to create English and Civic courses, especially for immigrant workers.

dominant group would proceed through the natural stages of competition, conflict, and accommodation to eventually become assimilated into dominant culture. Returning to Alabama as the keynote speaker for the Founder's Day Ceremony at Tuskegee Institute on April 12, 1942, Park told the audience that although Washington initially ignored his stories about the "tragic insecurity under which color people lived." Park soon understood that behind Washington's silence was a deep understanding of the social and historical processes that lay beneath that "superficial patterns and external aspects of southern life." Park went on to say that Washington understood "a great historical process; a process which was slowly but inexorably changing traditional institutions in this, as in every other part of the United States, including the traditional relations between the races."

Washington and the Tuskegee Institute's work among the Negro masses, specifically the poor and uneducated, provided the case study for Park's cultural view that Negroes were malleable and fully capable of participating in the advancement of modern civilization. Park paid tribute to Washington and the Tuskegee machine by organizing an "International Conference on the Negro: Education of the Primitive Man" in April of 1912. In his lecture, "Education of Cultural Groups," Park noted that the Tuskegee Machine's scheme of education (meaning its open door policy where poor girls and boys could work and earn an education) instilled a kind of discipline that has brought out the best in students." This conference would serve as the foundation for the Chicago race-relations studies by starting an intellectual correspondence between Park and the bohemian social psychologist, William Issac Thomas. Washington's work in uplifting the masses taught Park about the civilization processes among groups marginalized from modern life. Booker T. Washington's rise from the crude conditions of slavery illustrated

the achievement of the modern "self-made man" that Park optimistically felt the black race would ultimately achieve through agricultural labor. In this sense, the moral and industrial education partly provided the platform for Park's social psychological and sociological examination of the intersections between individual and social group organization in geographical spaces. Moreover, the industrial education designed to modernize Negroes, Natives Americans, and Africans at both the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes offered a case in point for the development of Chicago School of race relations. At the International Conference Park and William I. Thomas spent the last day of the conference underscoring the role of culture in the development of mental traits and subsequently Africans and Negroes acculturation into the "white man's civilization."

The vast amount of information and insight on the Negro was attributed to Park's travels and visits with rural Negroes in the "Deep South." Trained in Washington's laboratory of the rural or Deep South where he intimately observed the "Folk Negro," Park explained that during his seven-year tenure in the Rural South, "for all intents and purpose, for the time, [I became] a Negro, myself."[21] In Park's race-relations scheme, the opposite of modern or urban civilization was "folk" and rural cultures. The contemporary literature on the Chicago School of race and race relations often overlooks the rural dynamic that grounded their understanding of modern and urban life in the twentieth century. The Chicago School of race and race-relations perpetuated the urban and rural split. Park asserted, "The culture of the modern man [was] characteristically urban, as distinguished from the folk culture, which rests on personal relations

[21] Robert Park, "Life-Histories of W.I. Thomas and Robert E. Parks," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Sept., 1973), pp. 258. Originally, sociologist Luther Bernard set out to published a project on personal interviews with over two hundred sociologists in America beginning in 1927. He never completed the project. Paul Baker published both Thomas and Park's interviews in 1973.

and direct participation in the common life of the family, the tribe, and the village community."[22] In this sense, an interesting twist in their cultural turn in matters pertaining to race was that the peasant/folk culture and rural life held a special theoretical place in the Chicago School and in the scientific study of racial behaviors and group organizations. Park, essentially framed the racial problem in the modern city as a cultural problem of adjustment and acculturation between "groups making the transition from rural to urban contexts; simple to complex situations; and sacred to secular life organizations..." In a lecture, Park captured with a question the inclusive problem of adjustment and acculturation within social change, which included both European immigrants and rural American Negroes: "How can we understand the breaking down of an old and the development of a new culture?"[23] The "old" in the breakdown of old cultures due to the impingement of urbanization denoted the elementary and peasant habits and attitudes formed in geographically and socially isolated rural environments. Park and the Chicago School of race relations characterized rural and folk life as "isolation." Isolation was a key term in

Park's lexicon and referred to the collective group behaviors and social organizations formed in rural environments outside the modern city, that were generally characterized by either "geographical remoteness, poverty, ignorance of reading…" University of Chicago's social psychologist, William I. Thomas noted, "by reason of poverty, geographical isolation, individuals, communities, and races may be excluded from some of the stimulations and copies which enter into a high grade of the mind."[24] The exclusion from high grade of the mind (e.g. science), complex cultures and mainstream society captured what Park called the "folk people."

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[22] Robert E. Park, "Magic, Mentality, and City Life," *The City,* Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Rodeick McKenzie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 130.
[23] "Notes on Robert Park's Lectures" in Fisk University Archive.
[24] William I. Thomas, "Race Psychology: Standpoint and questionnaire, with particular reference to the Immigrant and the Negro," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (May, 1912), 744.

Park noted, "The distinction between them and the peoples by whom they are surrounded is that they are not merely people, but folk people, and their culture, in so far as it differs from that of the majority of us in the United States, is a folk culture."[25] In essence, folk people and cultures were thought to underscore life on the "margins of culture" or civilization. Johnson would perpetuate this notion of folk culture in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

Park's students, Charles Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier, replicated the rural/urban distinction in their race relations studies. Yet both Johnson and Frazier moved away from the naturalism that invaded Park's conversation about the acculturative and assimilative process of race and ethnic groups moving to industrial society. Their understanding of race relations was deeply grounded in social, economic, and cultural realities that actually forced Park to rethink his notion of Negroes and the difficulties of assimilation in America. Yet, the cultural turn in race relations research espoused by Thomas and Park was music to Johnson ears since this theoretical shift "veered from the virulent racism that characterized much American scholarship on the subject."[26]

III. Charles Johnson, Fisk University, and the Peasant Dilemma in Race Relations Research

Park's cultural and psychological analyses of the old, rural, peasant life-organization and folk culture in his broader sociological study of modern race relations was further developed by sociologist Charles Johnson and the social science department at Fisk University in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. Johnson resigned from his position at the National Urban League and accepted Fisk President Thomas Jones's offer to head the social science

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[25] Robert Park, *Shadow of the Plantation* (Charles S. Johnson), x.
[26] Barbara Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Besides: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71. Savage brilliantly captures the context where ethnography and fieldwork was utilized to study Negro religion in the 30s and 40s.

department in September 1928. Subsequently, other Chicago-affiliated sociologists such as Robert Park and E. Franklin Frazier relocated to Nashville, and were accompanied by their massive race relations library, modern theories, and methodologies that deepened the intellectual exchange between University of Chicago and Fisk University. Johnson envisioned the offer to head Fisk's social science department as an opportunity and challenge to "inaugurate a broad social program in the South, where a vast majority of Negroes reside."[27] Johnson organized Fisk's social science department prompted by his latent desire to "get into the material of the Southern Negro," which he felt was scientifically lacking in the field of social science. Similar to Odum at UNC, the shy but energetic sociologist would transform the social science department into what historian Jonathan Holloway dubbed a "regional research dynamo" in the first half of the twentieth century. Johnson's assertion that "Fisk University has an advantage in being located in the South where little has yet been done in the field" was congruent with ideals surrounding Fisk's mission of scholarship and service to the immediate world his students inhabited. Johnson's decision to accept the position at Fisk took place on the heels of an emerging racial liberal network that formed an intellectual and social front beginning in the New Deal era. In fact, Johnson developed the department within this racial liberal orbit that included the collective interests of philanthropic and civil organizations, social science institutes, and New Deal programs. Highlighting such organizations and programs such as the Office of Education, Works Progress Administration, The Rosenwald Foundation, and Yale Institute of Human Relations, historian Harvard Stikoff claimed that racial liberalism "stimulated government and

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[27] Ibid.

philanthropic officials to champion the new intellectual consensus on race."[28]. The activities of major philanthropic organizations and the New Deal liberal bureaucrats propelled by Franklin Roosevelt's new style of government post 1932 helped to create the racial liberal environment and intellectual climate in which Johnson and the social science department flourished in the 1930s and '40s.

It is important to understand the connection between the involvement of philanthropic organizations in funding race relations research and Franklin D. Roosevelt's new-styled "vibrant government" that engendered the climate of interracial reform and social engineering. Johnson and Fisk social scientists laid out their grievances, via social scientific research, regarding the New Deal programs and legislation such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) that disproportionately favored whites planters over the landless and dependent vast blacks tenant farmers. In their coauthored publication, *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, Johnson, Edwin Embree (director of the Julius Rosenwald fund), and Will Alexander (director of the Commission of Interracial Cooperation) criticized the AAA for "assum[ing] many of the risks of the landowners, and throwing them on the tenant."[29] This critical text caught Roosevelt's attention and led to the formation of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) that often consulted with the Fisk social science department in the training of social workers and southern leaders to revitalize their agricultural communities. Johnson understood that it was not enough to "wait watchfully for time's slow solution of social ills," but that it was necessary for the federal government to

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[28] Harvard Stikoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*, 151

[29] Charles Johnson, Edwin Embree, and Will Alexander, *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), pp. 50.

more actively "assume a positive role in order to change economic and race relations."[30] Historian Walter Jackson noted that Johnson "differed from Park, however, in his willingness to advocate government planning and social reform."[31].

Johnson and company were instrumental in comprehending the cultural behaviors of the impoverished southern Negro in an intellectual atmosphere where social scientists were more concerned with laying out the psychological consequences of the racial politics that informed the occupational and economic realities in the Jim Crow South. Moreover, the rural South was just as much as cultural-psychological symptom as a geographical location mired in economic decay. For Johnson, the behavioral dimension of the rural south was predicated on the plantation economy that was an extension of slavery and continued as a result of the "splendid failure" of American Reconstruction.[32] It was in Johnson's repudiation of the plantation economy, that he replicated Park's view of the folk cultures. Building on Park's notion of "isolation," Johnson believed that the self-contained cotton-economy fashioned cultural and behavioral patterns that constituted the folk mind and behavioral patterns of "America's peasantry." Aside from the unpainted cabins, poor diet, pellagra, chronic alcoholism, and illiteracy, the plantation economy

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[30] Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 71

[31] Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 71-72. Both Gilpin and Gasman push beyond my argument concerning Johnson's liberalism in that they recognize that Johnson embraced a sociology of tension—meaning that he felt that tension, via group solidarity through political protest, was creative in the larger struggle for social change (inclusion and assimilation) in American life. All in all, tension was necessary for the "acceleration of change." To be sure, this puts Johnson in a different camp than the white southern liberals like Odum and Johnson, but his stress on inclusion and assimilation was certainly the stuff of racial liberal reform. I am not necessarily critiquing Johnson's racial liberalism, my point is to simply suggest that the flourishing of the Johnson and Fisk University was partly attributed to the racial liberal orthodoxy that included philanthropic foundations (i.e. Julius Rosenwald, Rockefeller Foundation), religious organizations (American Missionary Association), and federal programs (FSA, Tennessee Valley Authority or WPA).

[32] The regions representative of the plantation economy were Eastern North Carolina, lower Piedmont; the upper coastal plain of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama; the delta and loess bluff regions of the Mississippi, and its tributaries in the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas [44]. For Johnson, the plantation system [44]

also bred a rudimentary and outworn folk culture formed in social, cultural, and economic isolation. Agreeing with Park's definition of folk people as "marginal peoples," Johnson understood that isolation and marginalization from mainstream America because of substandard living conditions was a key component in what it meant to represent a "folk group." In his statistical and ethnographical study of 612 families, with the assistance of the students in the department, Johnson asserted that in Macon County, Alabama, the "marks of such an encircled life may be observed…in the characteristic folk ways associated with this life; in the characteristic forms of its thought and expression." Johnson refuted the argument that a peasant class was nonexistent in America due to its lack of a feudalistic order. In his Master's thesis on the changing conditions of plantation culture in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Johnson's student Samuel Adams deemed it appropriate to use the term "folk" because it was a "useful [and] heuristic concept in making an objective investigation of plantation Negro life."[33] Underneath Johnson's critique of the "isolated and provincial folk cultures" was the projection of a utopian view of modernity itself.

To flesh out the folk mind developed in isolation from the modern mainstream, Johnson turned his attention to the problem of religious belief. He noted that the behavioral aspects of the plantation economy were most clearly exhibited in the supernatural and ecstatic religious culture of the black peasantry. This supernatural culture of belief and expression was a key component in defining folk and "plantation Negro." On one level, Johnson's attention to the supernatural

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[33] Samuel C. Adams, "Changing Negro Life in the Delta" (M.A. Thesis, Fisk University, 1947), pp. 246. Adams' master's thesis was reprinted in *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov. Adams was a first graduate student in the social science department at Fisk University in 1940/1941. After completing the master degree at Fisk University, Adams attended University of Chicago and received his doctoral degree in sociology in 1953. He was then appointed as an Ambassador to the Republic of Niger from 1968-1969

that informed black peasants' religious and everyday experiences underscored the different temporalities of existence used to classify folk and civilized groups and subsequently plantation and urban social communities. Most importantly, it was folk supernatural belief systems organized in the idiom of the plantation society that so helped to bolster Johnson's and Fisk's core social scientific argument that social environment rather than racial traits enforced "elementary" cultural and behavioral patterns. Espousing the emphasis of the social environment in religious and cultural orientation, Johnson noted, "There are many differences in religious practices in the different localities. One of the major differences in religious practices is between the churches in the plantation area and those located in the non-plantation areas near the towns."[34] The study of supernatural beliefs and expressions that defined the folk was clearly a significant discourse at Fisk University and in the overall liberal racial causes in highlighting the ramifications of racial and economic arrangement. Fisk social scientists took seriously the supernaturally-infused and plantation realities of dreams, visions, other-worldly sermons, bodily gyrations, and health remedies of the magical, Sanctified, and Primitive Baptist traditions in the surrounding areas of Coahoma County, Mississippi; Johnston, North Carolina; Davidson County, Tennessee; and Greene County, Mississippi. Johnson categorized these folk beliefs and expressions as illustrative of the "plantation church" in contrast to the "non-plantation church."

In his "The Acculturation of the Delta Negro," Charles Johnson's graduate student, Samuel Adams, remarked that the source of the [religious] expressive behaviors were in the immediate world of their religious and work life experience on the King and Anderson cotton plantation in

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[34] Charles Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (District of Columbia: American Council on Education, 1941), pp. 142.

the Mississippi Delta.[35]

Johnson's concern about the supernatural beliefs actually developed before his tenure at Fisk University. Prior to his arrival at Fisk University, Johnson expressed the sociological importance of folk belief studies in his review of Newbell Niles Puckett's *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926) while serving as an editor of the National League's *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*. In the October edition of *Opportunity* in 1926, Johnson referenced the value of folk-belief studies in his assertion that Puckett's field-study of the "mental heirlooms" of the southern Negro that governed the social habits and life-organizations captured the social environment. The former editor of *Opportunity* reminded readers of the value of "[w]hat these beliefs reveal of the fascinating interplay of advanced and backwards cultures, of the absolute qualities of ignorance, of the strangle-hold of superstitions of untutored minds…[and] of the intellectual and spiritual isolation they reflect."[36] Although Johnson acknowledged the complexity of rural life in his dichotomy between country and town (or plantation and non-plantation), he continued to work within Park's rural/urban split by heightening the cultural distinction between superstitious beliefs and scientific knowledge. He asserted that, "these beliefs…thread through the whole pattern of southern folk life, fierce and dominant where the light of science is blocked out."[37] Johnson's cultural analysis of superstitions in contrast to modern science was guided by the rural/urban split. Rather than using the religion/secular distinction, Johnson's rural/urban split designed to culturally map folk and non-folk behaviors underscores how the secular or scientific engendered the categories of "true and false" beliefs and expressions in order anthropologically

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[35] Samuel Adams Jr., "The Acculturation of the Delta Negroes," *Social Forces* (Dec., 1947), pp. 202.
[36] Charles Johnson, "Review of Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro," in *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (October, 1926), 324.
[37] Ibid, 324.

to classify racial groups in relationship to their proximity to modern culture. Modern science and medicine did not necessarily cancel out the religious per se, but shifted and reorganized religious belief in such a way that the modern medical doctors and biomedicine replaced the witch or root doctor, medicine man, amulets, and charms in supernatural culture. Folk religion underscored that the rural and plantation represented an early cultural stage of development.

This rural/urban split replicated in the distinction between supernatural belief and modern science was evident also in Johnson's and Fisk's social scientists' concern about the high disease and mortality rates of southern Negroes in the Black Belt South. Johnson and others attributed the poor health of the southern Negroes to an environment devoid of modern scientific education and quality healthcare facilities and resources in the rural South. As editor of *Opportunity*, Johnson was extremely invested in the relationship between superstition and health in the "background regions of the south, where incidentally most of [Negroes] live." In his editorial entitled, "Superstition and Health," Johnson concentrated on the various popular supernatural beliefs that defied the logics of biology and physiology that modern field of medicine had gained a social capital on in the first half of the twentieth-century. To illustrate his point he referenced a southern migrant family who painted their child's face with "blueing" to keep the "fever away." Fortunately, a doctor provided the child a proper diagnosis of diphtheria and was able to heal him.[38] Unfortunately, the cured child's two siblings were not so lucky. These superstitious beliefs—such as that tea made of steeped sheep manure can cure scarlet fever—assisted in keeping the Negroes' "lifespan to about five years shorter than the white, and the death rate

[38] Charles S. Johnson, "Superstition and Health," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (July, 1926), p. 207.

about twice as high."[39] He saw that people's migration from the isolated rural to the modern city and its modern medicine helped to curb the diseases and high morality rates of the Negroes.

Fisk University's interest in superstitions for the sake of exploring the state of Negro health and education continued during the third decade of the twentieth century. The idea that folklore studies could be used to collect and document the superstitions and remedies with a concern for the contentious relationship between southern Negroes and modern medicine harkens back to Alice Bacon and the first African-American folklore society at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and Dixie Hospital beginning in the late nineteenth century.[40] Fisk social scientists' collection and documentation of superstitions were part and parcel of the liberal programs and policies designed to reform racial relations and the arena of health in the rural South. By the late 1920s, spearheaded by its new director, Edwin Embree, the Rosenwald Fund launched its national and southern campaign to democratize advanced medical institutions and resources to the nation's impoverished communities and the rural south. Embree and others felt that health-oriented national and southern policies would indirectly contribute to improving blacks and the southern economy. Embree asserted, "In 1936, the *New York Times* reported

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[39] Charles S. Johnson, "More About Superstitions and Health," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (September, 1926), p. 271.

[40] The first professional African American Folklore Society was the Hampton Folklore Society under the direction of Alice Bacon in 1893. The Hampton Folklore Society was a local branch of the American Folklore Society. Shaped by her modern, northeastern Protestantism (Congregationalist), Bacon noted that one of the central goals of Negro folklore was to comprehend the "minds of the cabin people." By grasping the "minds of the cabin people," a central concern for Bacon was the pervasive superstitious beliefs that hindered blacks from taking advantage of the local Dixie Hospital and modern medicine. Her preoccupation with exorcizing Negro superstitious beliefs was part and parcel of Samuel Armstrong's, principal of Hampton Normal and Agricultural School (mentor of famous alum, Booker T. Washington), mission to rid Negroes of superstitious paganism and move them to Protestant morality in order to equip them for industrial labor and subsequent modern citizenship. For information on Alice Bacon and Dixie Hospital, see: Darlene Clark, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). For a superb history of Alice Bacon and the Hampton Folklore Society, see: Donald Waters, ed. *Strange Ways and Sweet Dreams: Afro-American Folklore from Hampton Institute* (Boston: G.K. Hall &Company, 1983), pp. 1-128.

Michael Davis and the Rosenwald foundation's five-point plan to "socialize medicine" in America. Two of the Fund's points, as articulated by its medical director, Davis, [were] to allocate state and national taxes to "supplement local resources in rural areas," and for "people without the means." While the Fund allocated monies to medical institutions that trained Negro physicians and nurses in the overall acculturation of Negroes in the body-politics, Johnson and Fisk fieldworkers were busily supporting the health policies and programs by examining the outworn, rudimentary, and supernaturally informed practices of rural and impoverished Negroes; their work underlined the geographical, social, and economic lag of the rural south in the way of modern science and medicine. An unnamed fieldworker in Mineral Springs, Louisiana documented how in an all-female "home economics class," a young girl questioned the narrative of the Hebrew-Protestant creation story once Mrs. Riddle instructed them on the "physiology of menstruation." According to the fieldworker, "One of the girls asked, "Mrs. Riddle, then our bodies don't come from the dust do they? And Mrs. R. proceeded to explain the life processes."[41] The young girl's encounter with understanding biology confirmed Johnson's belief that the more rural Negroes encountered the field of natural sciences, the less that the folk beliefs would have control over their minds. In his study of rural Negro youth, Johnson noted that young persons were growing tired of the superstitious beliefs in plantation churches due to their exposure to modern education and particularly science.

Fisk fieldworkers documented how many rural Negroes depended on medicine-men and Negro mid-wives who were "superstitious and old-fashioned." While federal, state, and private philanthropies designed programs to modernize blacks and rural south through training and

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[41] "Interviews Concerning Health" by Fisk University, Dept. of Social Sciences (Nashville: Fisk University), 2, Fisk University Archives.

certifying nurses and midwives, according to the Fisk fieldworkers many midwives fed their patients' "folk-minds" by, for example, prescribing "Kirby's Miracle Water," a cure-all that was advertised through a "number of testimonials of [its] healing power," particularly "one from a preacher whose wife was healed from a gastric and ulcerated stomach."[42] Despite the new state regulations that all midwives were required to attend the monthly meetings on behalf of the United States Public Health Service and State Department of Health, one midwife measured and supplied doses of the "Kirby Miracle Water" and her "homemade herb concoctions." The Fisk fieldworker noted that the health agent, Florence Beatty, "has her own peculiar notions and clings to them; for she frequently boasts that she can do more than the licensed physician for her patients by using her home-made moon-suggested and herb concoctions. She has many signs and notions that she holds are inviolate."[43] Fieldworkers collected similar superstitions and herb-concocted remedies in other rural areas such as Red Oak, Georgia. In his *Shadow of the Plantation*, Johnson briefly mentioned how the anachronistic and supernatural beliefs interfered with the Rosenwald foundation's attempt to establish clinics and administer new and more fitting controls in plantation churches to address syphilis and other venereal diseases.[44] According to Johnson, the plantation church struggled to communicate the value of clinics in naturalistic and humanistic terms due to its reliance on supernaturalism. In parts of Macon County, Alabama, the lack of medical knowledge and access to medical doctors contributed to the high mortality and

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[42] Ibid.10.

[43] Ibid, pp. 10.

[44] Charles Johnson, *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1941), 152-153. The clinics were apart of the Julius Rosenwald Found and the United States Public Health Service study of the prevalence of syphilis among Negroes in parts of the South. According to Johnson, the purpose of the experiment was "determining the practicality and effectiveness of measures for the mass control of syphilis [188]."

severe ailments that "exceed[ed] their simply folk knowledge.[45] Wedding cultural evolutionism with racial liberalism, Johnson recognized that the rural Negroes' dependence on superstitious remedies concocted by medicine men and midwives reflected how southern Negroes were stuck in the early stages of medicine and science due to their relative environmental and cultural isolation. In essence, some people depicted these folk superstitions as a form of cultural backwardness that reflected their adherents' social environment. In the end, the clash between the old and new captured in "old-fashioned" superstitious beliefs of midwives and the modern medical practices of trained black doctors in the rural South reflected Johnson's assertion that Negroes stood at each end of the acculturation processes and that with reform all blacks could assimilate into mainstream culture. In this sense, folk beliefs were "normal stages of development" that all groups pass through.

Faculty and students such as Andrew Polk, Lewis Jones, and Samuel Adams attended "plantation churches" and recorded the conversion experiences, songs, sermons, prayers, and other expressions that made up the supernatural and ecstatic religious cultures displayed by the folk Negroes in Sunday, funeral, and baptismal services in plantation churches, barns, seed houses, and on levees. Social scientists at Fisk understood that the heavy emphasis on the supernatural phenomena triggered the ecstatic worship-styles (i.e. the shouting, screaming, falling, rolling, laughing, jerking, and even barking) and that the Baptist plantation church provided a space for such emotional and free expression to compensate for the "present hard life for the next world." Johnson's graduate student, Andrew Polk says that shouting happens when an individual feels the spirit. In his ethnographic study of Black Primitive Baptist in Central

[45] Ibid., 207.

Tennessee, Polk visited a baptismal ceremony and observed how the "candidate" shouted to legitimate their "new birth" or acceptance into the faith community. He observed that the "candidate shouts or shows some sign of being possessed by the spirit." He goes on to conclude that "[a] failure on part of the candidate to do this may arose suspicion among some of the old heads that [the candidate] went in a dry devil and came out a wet one."[46] The Primitive Baptists supernatural religious experiences, e.g. shouting and conversions, was meant to transcend the "sin-sick soul." One female congregant explained: "I shout because there is a fire on the inside. When I witness the truth, the fire moves on the altar of my heart."[47]

IV. Negro Folk-Religion and the Cultural Derivative Theory in Racial Liberalism[48]

At the heart of folklore studies was a preoccupation with the whole acculturation process. Often overlooked in the Negro folklore studies of Johnson, Fisk social scientists, and the overall racial liberal contingent in the New Deal era was the strategic role that rural and impoverished white sharecroppers and tenants played in the study of the "origins" of black folk supernatural beliefs and expressions. As early as 1926, Johnson stressed that the cultural backwardness of superstition was not limited to Negroes.[49] To move away from the category of racial traits in the direction of economic and occupational differentiation to accentuate social environment and the possibility of black acculturation, Johnson and his racial liberal colleagues like Guy Benton

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[46] Andrew Polk, *Primitive Religion Among Negroes in Tennessee* (M.A. Dissertation, Fisk University, 1932), 44
[47] Ibid, 56
[48] I borrow this term, "derivative theory" from Lawrence Levin in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Levin lumped Newman White, Guy Johnson, and George Pullen Jackson into the derivative camp ---meaning that they focused exclusively on the Anglo-European origins of the black folklore spirituals and deny the African influences. While Levine is correctly, with Guy Johnson, he overlooks the racial liberalism that informed Johnson's derivative argument. This section is my attempt to historically situate the derivative theory in racial liberalism and the denial of fixed race traits.
[49] Charles Johnson, "Superstition and Health," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (1926).

Johnson, Niles Puckett, Allison Davis, and Gunnar Myrdal highlighted the cultural and behavioral comparison between both low-income southern Negro and white folk supernatural and ecstatic cultures. In 1934, Johnson stated, "their superstitions most often are borrowed from whites, their religious beliefs are in large part the same as those held by isolated whites." [50]

More specifically, Johnson constantly looked to the evangelical camp meetings and revivals among the white planters and lower classes in the early nineteenth century to understand the origins of the Negro folk supernatural and ecstatic religion. He asserted, "It was during the heyday of their camp meetings and revivals at the beginning of the nineteenth century that patterns of religious expression were established."[51] Defined as the religion of the heart over and against the Anglican religion of the head, the so-called democratized strain of the camp meetings and revivals appealed religiously to both the black slaves and white farmer class in the plantation economy. Johnson noted, "The patterns of social behavior to which the Negroes were exposed, whether set by planters or poor whites, cannot be said to have been ideal."[52] In this sense, Johnson scientifically used folklore studies to address problem of the origins of Negro religious cultures by strategically lifting up the white Methodist and Baptists' evangelical camp-meetings in the "Great Awakening" period to ideologically package his folklore "derivative thesis" and demonstrate that race or "African influences" had nothing to do with folk Negro religious cultures. Instead, the "evangelical appeal on untutored mind[(s)" that led to the Christianization of Negro slaves owed much to the dominant Baptist and Methodist traditions of rural Negroes of Macon County in the 1930s. Fisk graduate student Andrew Polk confirmed Johnson's camp

[50] Charles Johnson, *In the Shadow of the Plantation*, 4.
[51] Ibid, 151.
[52] Ibid., 5.

meeting "origins" of Negro folk religious cultures when he collected religious experience narratives from former slaves in the 1930s. One former slave stated, "When the white folks had revivals the niggers from all around would gather on the outside and listen [to] them sing and pray."[53] Historian Carter G. Woodson acknowledged that the emphasis on the "narcotics of religion" among blacks was a learned behavior from "early white Methodists and Baptists who evangelicalized the slaves and poor whites." He complained about the folk and ecstatic customs of the white "holy rollers."[54]

All in all, Johnson articulated a "derivative theory" of Negro folk supernatural culture that was a part of his commitments to racial liberalism. The derivative theory maintained that the Negro folk religious culture derived from the white plantation culture as exhibited in the revivals and superstitions among the planters and poor whites. He interpreted these white Baptist and Methodist camp meetings as well as superstitions in the antebellum South to be extensions of the "survivals" of European folk and magical traditions developed by English colonists. Building on Newbell Puckett, these supernatural and ecstatic orientations in the eighteenth century were abandoned by many whites due to their access to modern society beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Therefore, Johnson noted that both the low-income whites and blacks perpetuated these outworn folk religious cultures thanks to their cultural, social, economic, and geographical isolation from modern society in the twentieth century. He was in

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[53] Johnson quoted from Watson Polk in *Shadow of the Plantation*, pp. 152. Watson was an anthropology student at Fisk University. He wrote his Master's Thesis (M.A.) on Primitive Baptist in Central Tennessee in 1932. He also collected conversion narratives from ex-slaves between 1927-1929 with his former professor, Paul Radin. Radin left the social science department in 1929. Radin's interpretative understanding of the conversion narratives differed significantly from Johnson and the Fisk sociologists' view of the folk supernaturalism. I will mention Radin in Chapter 3. For more on the ex-slave conversion narratives, see: *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*, ed. Clifton H. Johnson (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1969).

[54] Carter G. Woodson, "The Negro Emphasizes "Narcotics" of Religion: Whites As Emotional in the Field of Religion as Negroes," *Philadelphia Tribune,* Jun. 18, 1931, 9.

agreement with Niles Puckett's assertion: the so-called Negro church problem is simply one aspect of the larger rural church problem." He further comments, "Various elements of the problem may be referred to environmental rather than to racial antecedents and are to be found with isolated rural white folks." Johnson's students confirmed the role of the social environment when they observed black sharecroppers in plantation communities near Clarksdale, Mississippi. Since Clarksdale was undergoing industrial shifts due to commerce and modern developments of stores, schools, automobile dealerships, etc., Adams argued that folk and plantation religion was fading from blacks' everyday existence due to their "greater participation" in city life in Clarksdale. Adams noted that even the "Negro [plantation] church," one of the most important institutions of social control, will feel the industrial tide. Since the industrial tide of literature and education, juke box and radio, the rise of burial associations and other organizations together loosened the grip of folk culture on the minds of the plantation Negroes, improving the social environment via industrialization was key to the acculturation process of southern blacks and their religious cultures.[55] Underneath Johnson and his student's liberal reform and study of black religion was a slight utopian view of modern industrialization.

To highlight strategically the low-income white agriculturalists and their folk beliefs as influencing southern Negro folk supernaturalism, Johnson and company countered the Columbia anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits, Ruth Landes, Elsie Parsons, Zora Hurston, and their attention to African-derived religious cultures due to the former's worry that the American

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[55] Samuel Adams, *Changing Negro Life in the Delta* (Nashville: Fisk University, M.A. Thesis, 1947), pp. 225-290, reprinted in *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942,* eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), pp. 225-290. Both Gordon and Nemrov recover the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study that was previously narrated from the pen of Alan Lomax in his autobiography, *The Land Where the Blues Began.* In Lomax's account, he downplays the perspectives of Fisk scholars and their attention to change in Clarksdale, Mississippi, especially that of John Work. I will discuss John Work and this study more in Chapter 4.

public's perceptions of Africa were intertwined with fixed racial traits and necessarily led to the inability to assimilate into American society. In fact, their critique of Africanism reveals itself in Johnson's review of Puckett and his argument that Africanism unveils itself in the Negroes' quest for pleasure. Attention to the African diaspora interfered with Johnson and the racial liberals' efforts to reform the socioeconomic conditions of the rural South and overall American nation. They felt that attention to the social environment over against the actual members of the African diaspora gave them a better entré to government assistance, specifically in their efforts to incorporate Negroes into larger American mainstream society through implementing federal legislation and programs to improve cultural environments. In this sense, Johnson and other racial liberals felt that attention to African religions was a distraction from their liberal political strategy of racial democracy.

Conclusion

Johnson's critique concerning the cultural deficit of the Negro folk and plantation religious cultures was in part shaped by his Baptist tradition, stemming from his father who was a minister/pastor and furthered deepened by his undergraduate studies at Virginia Union. No doubt, his father's faith and cultural upbringing in Virginia contributed to his category of folk and plantation religion. Johnson was sure to make a notable distinction between his father and the "other typical Negro ministers in Southwest Virginia;" in the former's "quality and security of his education." A small yet dignified man, Johnson's father secured that rare quality of education due to the "good fortune" of his father's father laboring as a slave in the house of an owner who was "a quiet Greek scholar and theologian, lost in richness and other timeliness of

the classics, and so aloof from the burning political controversies of his time…"[56] This "quiet Greek scholar and theologian" allowed Johnson's grandfather and father to satisfy their intellectual appetites "without apology." Certainly Johnson father's "learned" Baptist tradition, which Johnson integrated into his secular faith, contributed to his field-analysis that the folk and supernatural religious cultures were founded on false beliefs and practices.

While Johnson may have knelt at the altar of modern science and industrialism, he did not succumb to an Alain Lockean's New Negro "race-pride" that compelled him to view the plantation Negroes as "social bogeys."[57] This analysis overlooks his valuable work as an editor for *Opportunity,* his reasoning for making the transition from New York to the "Sunny South", and most importantly, his engagement with Negro folk religious cultures. In fact, Johnson's scientific engagement with folklore, as an empirical methodology, arose out of his ideals to make the "everyday doings and sufferings" of rural Negroes intelligible to an American audience who struggled to rid themselves of the belief that Negro "racial traits" endangered the wellbeing of the national republic. He was determined the strip the concept of folk from its nineteenth-century romantic impulse by concentrating on the feudalistic social conditions in the plantation south. Folklore and subsequently the study of folk religious beliefs helped Johnson to present the world through the eyes of plantation Negroes. Essentially, for Johnson and company, the study of folk religious beliefs exposed the undemocratic social and personal environment that sharecroppers and tenant farmers inhabited in the Deep South. His premise for his analysis of folk religious beliefs and practices was steeped in the logic that these Negro sharecroppers and tenants farmers (and subsequently all Negroes) were quintessentially American.

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[56] Charles Johnson, "A Spiritual Autobiography," pp. 1.
[57] Newbell Puckett, "Folk-lore and Race Pride," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (March, 1926), pp. 82-84.

Yet, undergirding his work to make the world of plantation Negro intelligible, through an analysis of folk religious beliefs and practices, caused him to operate within the cultural framework set by industrialization that shaped his imaginative rural/urban cultural divide. Like most racial liberals and their appeals to the ideal of assimilation, Johnson's reliance on cultural evolutionism informed his view that folk religious beliefs were elementary and rudimentary in comparison to the norms swearling around modernization. Paradoxically Johnson understanding that folk designed elementary "survivals" actually reproduced the nineteenth-century logic of cultural evolutionism, which E.B. Tylor and other ethnologists championed. Although Johnson recognized the instrumental work of southern religious beliefs and practices, from his perspective, it paled in comparison to urban and cosmopolitan society. This comparative analysis between old and new; rural and urban; primitive and civilized framed racial liberals' perceptions of rural and southern religions (and cultures) and called for social reform in the lagging South. His own faith in modernization blinded him from seeing value in the religious cultures of black farmers. In this sense, he could have taken a clue from cultural anthropologist Paul Radin, who was a faculty member in social science at Fisk University (1927-1929), who was more adamant in his investigation of the spirit and cultures (i.e. conversions) that kept the "former slaves turned Negroes" from falling prey to self-destruction. Radin did not ground his analysis of the folk or plantation conversion experiences among former-slaves in the Primitive Baptist community within the modern logics of belief and knowledge (or right and false beliefs).[58] Thus, the study of Johnson and Fisk social scientists' engagement with the Negro folk religious cultures captured the paradox of racial liberalism in 30s and 40s.

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[58] See: Paul Radin, "Forward: Status, Fantasy, and the Christian Dogma: A Note about the Conversion Experiences of Negro Ex-Slave" in *God Struck Me Dead*, pp. vii-xvi.

Most importantly, by showing that folk religious cultures informed Johnson and racial liberals view of the cultural deficit of the Negro lower-class to inform "poverty-knowledge," underscores that these New Deal racial liberals' attention to Negro folk religious cultures of the Negro lower-class was a precursor to the "culture of poverty" debates that informed national policies and debates in the second half of the twentieth-century.

Chapter 3

"A Reversion to Paganism:" Zora Hurston's Folk-Ethnography, Cultural Particularity, and the Search for the Spiritual Genius of Black Southerners

On December 14th 1927, Zora Neale Hurston boarded a 3:40pm train at Pennsylvania Station in New York City to travel to Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana.[1] Under the patronage of aristocrat Charlotte Mason, the thirty-seven year old Barnard graduate traveled south to embark on her second field expedition to collect folk-data from the "furthest Negro down" in the sawmills, phosphate mines, turpentine fields, prison farms, porches, and local communities. She became enamored by the religious landscape that had become so rich and varied thanks to the eighteenth-century influx of Haitians and French into the Bayou and Crescent City. She spent two years doing intensive fieldwork in New Orleans, engaging in participant observation and becoming involved to the extent of undergoing several initiations from hoodoo doctors before achieving her "crown" as a conjure queen.

In 1929, in a letter to her dear friend, Langston Hughes, Hurston made the field-changing observation that the Negroes had "reverted to paganism" due to their "revolt against the sterile rituals of the Protestant church."[2] Fascinated by the complex layers underneath mainline Protestantism, Hurston explained to Hughes that she intended to "trace some of the variations on Protestant themes like the Sanctified, Rollers, Jumpers, [and] Spiritualists."[3]

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[1] "To Langston Hughes," Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters, edited, Carla Kaplan (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), pp. 110. This was Hurston's second field expedition to the Gulf Coast.
[2] "To Langston Hughes," Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters, pp. 157.
[3] Ibid., pp. 157.

Why in her correspondence with Hughes does Hurston use the term "paganism" to describe the religious experiences of southern Blacks in her folklore research? It was not the first time she had done so. In a letter to Franz Boas, Hurston had expressed that New Orleans, the "womb of cults," gave the Protestant churches an individualistic flair apart from dominant mainline denominations.[4] She attributed the individualistic character of the Protestant churches to the African-derived pagan and spiritual cultures displayed by southern blacks. During her field experiences in New Orleans, she further grounded her view that black southerners exposed the flexibility of Christianity and its room for spiritual pantheisms such as nature worship. Hurston wrote to Boas: "Is not the Christian ritual rather one of attenuate nature-worship, in the fire, water, and blood?" She further conjectured that the beliefs and rituals in the Trinity, baptism, and sacraments confirmed that "Christianity" fed the pagan appetites of black hoodoo doctors and spiritualists in New Orleans. Yet she did not find this surprising, noting that, "Baptism is nothing more than water worship as has been done in one form or the other down thru the ages."[5]

Hurston was intent on showing that the much vilified southern black "two-headed conjure doctors," female spiritualists, and Sanctified churchgoers in fact exposed the pagan elements of Christianity by their recognition that religion "adapted to its locale, reclaiming some of its borrowed characteristics to itself."[6] It was thus not a contradiction in the folk spiritual world when Anatol Pierre or Albert Fetchard told Hurston during her

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4 "To Franz Boas," April 21, 1929 in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, pp. 137.

5 "To Langston Hughes," April 30, 1929 in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, pp. 139.

6 Zora Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990), pp. 183. Originally published in 1935, *Mules and Men* was based on Hurston's two expeditions to Florida and New Orleans from 1927 to 1931. Hurston actually compared hoodoo to Christianity by noting that both adopted themselves to specific locations.

hoodoo initiation that she was to read the third chapter of the Old Testament book of Job for nine days in order to receive and commune with spirits of death and marriage.[7]

Yet presumably she also deliberately mentioned paganism because she had noticed that many southern Negroes, such as Mother C.J. Hyde of St. James Temple of Christian Faith, felt they had to mask their hoodooism under Christian and spiritualist names in order to protect themselves and their congregants from retribution by law enforcement personnel. Hurston noted, "hoodooism [was] in disrepute, and certain of its practices forbidden by law."[8] Guided by her self-described "pagan knowledge," Hurston's folk-ethnography was designed to unveil the "secret" rituals of the southern Negroes that were suppressed by the local laws, prohibitions, and norms. Hurston noted, "Nobody knows for sure how many thousands in America are warmed by the fire of hoodoo, because the worship is bound in secrecy. It is not the accepted theology of the Nation and so believers conceal their faith."[9]

This chapter will explore Hurston's folk ethnography and the intersections of black paganisms and the suppressive dynamic of American religion in the twentieth century. This intersection between black paganisms and the standardization of American religion animated Hurston's preoccupation with beliefs and practices publicly considered

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[7] Both "Hoodoo in America" and Mules and Men were based on the same fieldwork in New Orleans in 1928. Hoodoo in American was published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931 before *Mules and Men* in 1935. In the two documents, Hurston invented and used different names for the same conjure doctors to protect their identities against law enforcement. In "Hoodoo in America," Albert Fetchard was Anatol Pierre in *Mules and Men.*

[8] Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 44 (October-December, 1931), pp. 319.

[9] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Harper & Row Publishing, 1990), pp. 185. Hurston's *Mules and Men* was published in 1935.

to be outside the values and norms that informed "true or good religion."[10] This chapter historically situates Hurston's folk-ethnography within a wider intellectual atmosphere in which social scientists were growing restless with the *Federal Report on Religious Bodies* and the bureaucratic failure to document these "new religious movements" that escaped the traditional view of American religion. For Hurston understood that her folk-ethnography and search for local black paganism and its subtle cultural complexities directly challenged racial liberals who grounded their democratic analyses of "southern-derived cults and sects" in cultural evolutionism (Chapter 2). Despite their intentions to expose the psychological and cultural impact of race and class systems, the racial liberals' secular critique of these popular religious movements in fact recycled and exacerbated the repressive dynamic of religion and civilization. Hurston undertook her search for black paganism underneath true or more broadly accepted religion to satisfy two basic tasks: Her first task was to affirm the spiritual genius of southern Negroes. Her second task, which was intimately connected to the first, was to expose the shortcomings of the modern study of religion that failed to take notice of black spiritual worlds in their cultural and local particularity. Both tasks were intimately connected.

Yet, as I will show, it is a mistake to separate Hurston's folk-ethnography and quest for local black paganisms from the professional network composed by Boas-inspired cultural anthropologists in the Columbia Department of Anthropology and the American Folklore Society.[11] Her affiliations with Boas specifically and the Columbia

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[10] I borrowed "true and good religion," from Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 177-204.

[11] Due to her connections with the school of anthropology at Columbia University, Hurston was a member of the American Folklore Society, American Ethnological Society and the American Anthropological

anthropologists more broadly extended back to her first year at Barnard College in 1925. Her first-year term paper attracted the attention of famed anthropologist Franz Boas who, along with Elsie Clews Parson, was deliberately searching for African American ethnographers to advance Negro folklore after World War I. Hurston's wish to free black southern folk and spiritual cultures from preconceived notions buried in "domestic Protestantism" and cultural evolutionism meshed nicely with Boas and Parson's plan to save the struggling discipline of Negro Folk Studies. Therefore, it was no wonder that famed anthropologist Melville Herskovits paired his former field assistant, Hurston, with fellow Columbia-affiliate Elsie Parsons.[12] Both were forging new pathways in modern Negro folklore scholarship.

In Herskovits' eyes, Hurston's ethnography of black religion and customs transgressed and expanded the dominant methodology of cultural evolutionism begun by E.B Tylor and advanced by American folk scientist Newbell Niles Puckett. Hurston broke new ground in the field of modern Negro folklore by approaching folk customs as a part of the "living beliefs of the people" within the orbit of their daily and local experiences. For Herskovits, Hurston's study of "Hoodoo in America" singlehandedly shifted the meaning of folk as defining an "ignorant, backwards, and quaint" group to signifying "any people or any class in any society that as a group exhibits identifiably distinctive modes of life."[13] Hurston defined folklore and customs as the "boiled-down

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Society. Zora Hurston, *Dust Tracks On A Road* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 1996), pp. 41. *Dust Tracks on a Road* was Hurston's autobiography first published in 1942.

[12] Hurston's first field assignment was to measure the skulls of blacks in Harlem. In a letter to Annie Meyer, Hurston explained, "I am being trained in Anthropometry and Dr. Herskovitch [sic] is calling me at irregular intervals to do measuring. She also told Meyer, "Oh, I am so tired tonight! Dr. [Herskovits] is putting me thru under pressure, as Boas is eager for me start." See, "To Anne Nathan Meyer," *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan, pp. 83.

[13] Melville Herskovits, "Folklore After A Hundred Years Later: A Problem in Redefinition," *Journal of American Folklore* (April-June, 1946), pp. 99.

juice of human living that was continually in the making."[14]This chapter discusses Hurston's folk ethnographic research among the Spiritualists, Hoodoo doctors, and Sanctified congregants in southern regions within the broader history of the study of American race and religion in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. While contemporary scholars generally associate Hurston's work with the New Negro Renaissance, my chapter investigates Hurston as an ethnographer of religious studies in the early twentieth century.[15] I argue that Hurston's folk-ethnography (or "spy-glass anthropology") was animated by her desire to capture the distinctive spiritual genius of the southern Negroes in their cultural particularity while challenging the standard view of religion grounded in liberal Christianity and civic norms. These spiritual traditions illustrated the "genius" of southern black working-class communities in the Gulf Coast. To discuss Hurston's folk-ethnography and quest for black spirituality in its geographical and cultural particularity is to suggest that she was a pioneer of the study of lived religions. Hurston's folk-ethnography moved scholars to understand religion as going beyond "formal creeds, doctrines, and theologies of a church-based faith tradition" and "include[d] beliefs embedded in ordinary experiences and the deeply held attitudes, values, and activities of members of a group or community."[16] In the end, Hurston

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[14] Zora Neale Hurston, "Folklore and Music" in the *Florida Negro* reprinted in *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (New York: The Library of Congress, 1995), pp. 875. The *Florida Negro* was part of her work with the Federal Writers' Project in 1938. Hurston was "acting as supervisor of the Negro unit of the Florida Federal Writers' Project." Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 252.

[15] For treatment of Hurston and Religion, see: Richard Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pgs. 12-38. See: Tracy Hucks, "Perspectives in Lived History: Religion, Ethnography, and the Study of African Diasporic Religions," *Practical Matters,* Spring 2010, Issue 3, pp. 1-17.

[16] Yvonne Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and The African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 4.

considered religious cultures as an integral part of the intimate "homely life" of black southerners. [17]

Approaching her work as intellectual history, I will further ground Hurston's work in black southern religion within the broader network of the Boas school in the department of anthropology at Columbia and in the American Folklore Society. But like the Boasian anthropologists, Hurston, at times, replicated the "salvage ethnography" that sought to collect these folk Negro religious customs before their "primitive imaginations," were "drained by formal education and mechanical inventions."[18] Salvage ethnography usually searched for folk data in particular places and forms that still bore the stamp of African diasporic cultures rather than modern environs. While Hurston's salvage folk-ethnography caused a break with the cultural evolutionary model espoused by racial liberals, it also compelled her, at times, to recycle the folk and modern divide that animated cultural evolutionists. By the late '30s and '40s, Hurston's study of black religious customs and the wider field of Negro folklore was eclipsed by the rise of the restless "caste and class" ethnographers who decried salvage ethnology and its failure to attend to the intersections between cultural behaviors and social structures in modern society. Southern black religion thus became less and less about seeking intimate knowledge of the spiritual genius of the Negro southerners than about how larger caste and class structures determined southern blacks' religious expressions and behaviors within the confines of Jim Crow. Even anthropologist Arthur Fauset in his 1945 book *New Gods in Black Metropolis* shifted from folklore studies to social anthropology to

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[17] The "homely life" was used in the Preface of Hurston's *Mules and Men* written by Franz Boas. Boas asserted, "It is the great merit of Miss Hurston's work that she entered into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them and was fully accepted…[xiii]."

[18] Zora Hurston, "Folklore and Music," in *The Florida Negro* reprinted in *Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, pp. 875.

recover black religion from assertions that blacks were naturally religious.[19] The rise of such social anthropology in America coincided with literary biographer Robert Hemenway's claim that Hurston's mission to celebrate black folkways "lost its public intensity" in the '40s.[20]

The emphasis of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, I will situate Hurston's folk-ethnography and study of black paganism within the wider history of cultural anthropology by discussing the influence of Franz Boas' pioneering work and institution building in the late nineteenth century. Boas used folklore (and study of mythologies and languages) as an important medium to advance his historical ethnology against cultural evolutionism.[21] Boas' emphasis on the locative dimension of culture solidified Hurston's folk-ethnography and grounded her search for distinctive black religious cultures in the Gulf Coast.

Secondly, I will explore Hurston's folk-ethnography of religious cultures and its contributions to the study of American race and religion in the twentieth century. That contribution centered around her understanding of cultural relativism animated by her grasp of the complex and varying elements that engender distinct cultures and

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19 Arthur Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944). Fauset challenged Melville Herskovits' argument about the instinctively religious of Negro and their political passiveness in their religion in *The Myth of the Negro Past.* Herskovits asserted, "It is because of this, indeed, that everywhere compensation in terms of supernatural is so immediately acceptable to this underprivileged folk---and causes them, in contrast to other underprivileged groups elsewhere in the world, to turn to religion rather than to political action or other outlets for their frustration [207]." Fauset counterargument: "The point to be noted is that the development of the Negro's church came as a result of the Negro's need in America for a place to express himself in various ways; it did not result from some inexorable law peculiar to his nature...[98].

20 *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life In Letters,* ed. Carla Kaplan, 429. j

21 William S. Willis, "Franz Boas and the Study of Black Folklore." William S. Wills Papers 1940-1985, *The American Philosophical Society*. Willis received his Ph.D. in anthropology at Columbia University in 1955. He would also become the first African American professor in anthropology at SMU.

geographies. I read her understanding of cultural relativism against the standard view of religion postulated by racial liberals and bureaucrats in the twentieth century.

Thirdly, at the height of the New Deal, the national recognition of social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner and the caste and class ethnographers and their study of modern communities trumped Hurston folklore scholarship and its Boas-influenced salvage ethnography. The steady rise of social anthropology coincided with the decrease of Negro folklore and the fact that folk-ethnographers turned their attention to Mexico, Asia, and Africa. We see this change in black anthropologist Arthur Fauset's switch in orientation from his earlier works on Negro folklore to the *Black Gods of Metropolis*. As Hurston's ambition to enter a doctoral program in anthropology under Boas at Columbia dried up like a "raisin in the sun," Allison Davis, John Dollard, and Hortense Powdermaker studied southern religion within the general laws of society.[22]

II. Against Cultural Evolutionism: Franz Boas' Historical Ethnology in Indian Mythology

Having accepted a two-year post to edit *Science*, a popular weekly newspaper, in New York City in 1887, Boas migrated to New York amid an intellectual climate in which ethnologists were engaged in a "herculean effort to collect, preserve, and exhibit Indian cultures" at the height of the "Indian Problem" in North America.[23] Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the professionalization of ethnology and anthropology coincided with the nativist laws, Protestant missionary programs, and industrial schools

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[22] Social psychologist John Dollard and social anthropologists Hortense Powdermaker did field research in Indianola, Mississippi in the late '30s. They both espoused a "caste and class" theory to understand cultural behaviors of both blacks and whites in the Jim Crow South. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937) and Hortense Powdermaker *After Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1939).

[23] Lee D. Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 68-69.

designed to assimilate American Indians into modern society. A couple of weeks after Boas arrived in New York City to begin his new post as assistant editor for *Science*, Congress signed one of many assimilative policies known as the Dawes Act of 1887. This act divided and turned large tribal reservations into small allotments for individual Native Americans who traded in their indigenous cultures for American civilized religion and behaviors. Escaping the meritocracy of the German academy as well as the anti-Semitism of Otto von Bismarck, Boas migrated to the New World with a desire to make a career in science, professionalize the field of ethnology, and change the methods used to study Native American cultures. The twenty-nine-year-old Jewish geographer-ethnologist would launch a different methodology in folk or primitive religions (myths and customs) while working on an ethnological assignment to study Native aboriginals on the North Pacific Coast under the auspices of the Committee of British Association for the Advancement of Science.

By the late nineteenth century, Boas and other professional ethnologists were engaged in efforts to salvage the "primitive religions" of the native aborigines while Protestant missionaries and government officials were involved in Christianizing and civilizing Native Americans through a series of laws and missionary and educational programs. The study of primitive or indigenous religions significantly shaped what many government officials and citizens saw as the "Indian Problem" and solidified the public and scientific value of ethnology in the late nineteenth century. The national "Indian Problem" framed how the public at large understood the primitive religious cultures of Native Indians and justified "vanishing policies and programs" in the mid to late

nineteenth-century.[24] At the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, an unnamed reporter chronicled that a crowd of nearly five hundred spectators requested that officials suspend the "savage brutality displayed at the sun dance held by the Quackahi Indians."[25] Due to the "heavy twine strings fastened through the slits in their bare backs," the unnamed reporter wrote, "little rivulets of blood trickled from the cuts down their backs." The reporter further observed that, "around and around they ran, leaping, twisting, [and] diving till it seemed to the horror-stricken spectators that each instant would see the flesh torn from their bodies." The reporter's coverage of the purportedly gruesome display of savagery in the Sun Dance was more than likely influenced by the government's desire to suppress these indigenous customs that threatened American life. This desire we see in the Religious Crime Codes of 1883; it subsequently led to the "Battle of Wounded Knee" in 1890. Due to the assimilative policies, ethnologists and their museums and professional societies would receive their "liberal share of public interest" because they incorporated the natural sciences into their study of Native American myths, customs, and ceremonials. The incorporation of the natural sciences into ethnology gave rise to the dominant comparative and evolutionary methodology that legitimated the boundaries between good and bad religion. Evolutionists contributed to the vanishing policies that facilitated or forced Native Americans' assimilation into the republic.

Ethnologist John Wesley Powell felt strongly that a comparative evolutionary methodology to the study of Native American primitive religions could assist public

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[24] I borrow "vanishing policies and programs" from Lee D. Baker. Vanishing policies refer to policies and programs that viewed that the "only good Indian was a [culturally] dead one. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." Baker is discussing the assimilation era of the nineteenth-century. See: Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University, 2010).

[25] "A Brutal Exhibition: Many Complaints about the Sun Dance by Indians at the Fair," *New York Times*, August 19, 1893, pp. 5.

policy and programs, and correct the mishaps of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In his *Report on the Methods of Surveying the Public Domain,* Powell petitioned that the government should federally support a department dedicated to studying Native American religions and cultures.[26] One of his reasons for supporting a federal department for the study of Native American primitive religions and cultures was that he saw that the assimilative laws and programs failed to understand the evolutionary stages of culture and the "slow irresistible influence of civilization on the Native Americans."[27] The savage does not convert "as in the twinkling of an eye," he noted. Reiterating his hypothesis about the slow rate of civilization, Powell began his presidential remarks by stating that, "It is a long way from savagery to civilization."[28] Yet these stages of culture are necessary and distinctive. Powell noted, "savagery is not an inchoate civilization, it is a distinct status of society."[29] Congress granted Powell's request to sponsor the Bureau of American Ethnology as part of the Smithsonian Institute in 1879. Shamanism, totemism, Ghost-Dance, sacred formulas, and other religious topics filled the Bureau of American Ethnology's annual report. Comparative religion was an important discourse within the government's vanishing policies.

Democracy was the highest stage of societal organization, Powell's comparative evolutionary model privileged the "six great religions" over and against the metaphysical, ritualistic, and creedal Native American religions. While he recognized the diverse religions beyond Protestantism in the civilization stage, his privileging of the six great

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[26] John W. Powell, *Report on the Methods of Surveying the Public Domain,* Washington D.C., Nov. 1, 1878, 15.

[27] Ibid.,

[28] J.W.Powell, "From Savagery to Barbarism: Annual Address of the Present," *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington*, Vol. 3 (Nov. 6, 1883-May 19, 1885), 173. The speech was actually delivered on February 3, 1885.

[29] J.W. Powell, "Report on Methods of Surveying...., 178.

religions was founded on his understanding that a "true religion" united the six great religions by their ethical comportment. Due to liberal democracy along with the dominance of science and industry, true religion was represented by what he called the religion of ethics rooted in the righteous deed. Powell asserted, "Though this religion is represented by diverse ceremonies and by differing theories of sacrifice, it is unified in practical ethics."[30] He further stated, "as the years pass, insistence on ceremony, insistence on sacrifice, and insistence on creed grows less and less, while instruction in ethics grows more and more."[31] Although he did not privilege Protestantism as many government officials did, he still managed to appeal to liberal Protestant by equating the universal true religion to Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." He made it a point to note that the triumph of the ethical over and against the ceremonial, sacrificial, and creed-driven religion would find its way into Catholicism.

Powell 's "pious nonsectarianism" and its emphasis on ethical religion linked him to a wider modern culture in which post-Christian scientists synthesized Protestantism, democracy, and natural sciences to create a common set of values and norms meant to judge between higher and lower, simple and complex, and good or bad forms of religions. Therefore, Powell's comparative model "created [a] class of world religions identified by enlightened liberal and rational characteristics for the promotion of industrial capitalism and democracy."[32]

Democracy for Powell had the ability to create a homogeneous religious culture amid a diverse array of organized religious institutions and cultures. Yet, Native

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[30] Ibid, 204.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, pp. 189.

American's deification of animals (savagery stage) and subsequent nature (barbaric stage) could not properly fit in a democratic, industrial society and contribute to the criteria of mutual reciprocity. Most Native Americans, Powell said, were stuck in the savagery stage since they held zoomorphic beliefs of the supernaturalism of "primordial animals," practiced worship styles centered on "procur[ing] benefits and avoid[ing] evil," and held dramatic ceremonies that reenacted "scenes in the mythological history of the tribes and of the gods." This stage was further compounded by the savage's attention to animal-laden diseases and sorcery. In this era, religion was an essential domain for comparing and classifying racial and ethnic groups in order to determine their "place" in industrial society. Comparing the "older system of morphology" to the "newer evolutionary frame of reference," Powell and cultural evolutionists compared and assembled so-called analogous religious data into general taxonomies to arbitrarily show the sequential development from the simple to the complex.[33]

The major problem with Powell's and others' ideas was that they assumed that similar mythologies arose independent of historical factors such as region, migration, and group interaction. In his "The Limitation of the Comparative Methodology," Boas noted that it follows from these observations that when we find analogous single traits of culture among distinct peoples, the presumption is not that there has been common historical source, but that they have arisen independently." Contra Powell and other evolutionary ethnologists, Boas did not reductively compare and classify similar mythologies to organic stages of the human culture. As a result of his extensive fieldwork in the Pacific Northwest between 1888 and 1889, Boas discovered that the similar myths

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[33] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," *The Map Is Not The Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 260.

in circulation among different tribes confirmed that a process of dissemination had influenced the rise of similar religious cultures; in short, such similar cultures did not arise organically and separately. Dissemination posited that analogous mythologies resulted from neighboring tribes occupying a "contagious" region that resulted in groups assimilating somewhat through the distribution and borrowing of myths. While in the North Pacific, Boas intently observed that the raven myth among the Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida was attributed to their shared location. Yet the further south he traveled, the more he noticed that the raven-myth gradually dwindled and was virtually non-existent among the Comox, Nootka, and Salish tribes. From this field observation Boas concluded: "On the whole the nearer the people, the greater the number of common elements; the farther apart, the less the number."[34]

Boas' notion of dissemination underscored that myths have foreign elements and complex origins. He stated that the same myths could have "developed in multiple ways." Boas' focus on dissemination discredited the idea that similar myths and cultures arise from the same laws. He noted, "I draw the conclusion that the mythologies as we find them now are not organic growths, but have gradually developed and obtained their present form by accretion of foreign material. Much of the material must have been adopted ready-made."[35] While tribes have borrowed myths "ready-made," Boas also concluded that tribes refashion the borrowed myths to fit their previous held traditions and beliefs. He asserted that the "myths [have] been adapted and changed in form

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[34] Franz Boas, "The Mythologies of the Indians," *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: Franz Boas Reader*, ed. George Stocking, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 145. This essay was originally published in 1905.

[35] Franz Boas, "The Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians," *The Shaping of American Anthropology,...154*

according to the genius of the people who borrowed it."[36] To be sure, Boas continued to value comparative methodology, his reference to the genius of the people reflected his view that the study of myths should be investigated from the standpoint of the holistic culture of a particular tribe. He noted that what was needed was "a detailed study of customs in their relation to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, in connection with an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes."[37]

His reference to the genius of the people was also a sign of his romantic temperament that significantly shaped his study of Native Americans and their mythology. Instead of the Darwinian influence that steered his colleagues to merge ethnology and natural sciences, Boas' historical ethnography was indebted to the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German romantic nationalism (or the Volk romanticism) inspired by Johann Herder, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who sought to capture the unadulterated and pure myths, tales, and songs found among German peasants to form a unified Germanic national identity at the height of Napoleonic rule.[38]

Herder insisted that each nation had a unique identity rooted in its distinctive cultural expressions. For Boas, this view of the Volk inspired him to document the distinctive spirit or genius of the Native aborigines as exhibited in their myths, languages, and tales. He further articulated his romanticism in his essay entitled, "The Study of Geography" in 1887. Similar to William James' "Sentiment of Rationality," Boas here

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[36] Franz Boas, "The Mythologies of the Indians," 147

[37] Matti Bunzel, "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksegeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture," *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and The German Anthropological Tradition,"* George Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 17-78.

[38] Given his Jewish identity, Boas was skeptical of nationalism. He denounced Hitler's use of the idea of "folk" in his German nationalism.

outlined two different modes of science and reduced them to essential temperaments and impulses. Boas preferred the affective to the aesthetic impulse. The affective impulse revealed a delight in the phenomena (mythology) for its own sake. On the other hand, the aesthetic impulse of the natural scientists and cultural evolutionists only appreciated a cultural phenomenon insofar as it "emanate[d] from a law…" While many cultural evolutionists were enthralled by the aesthetic impulse, Boas' historical ethnology outlined his appreciation with a phenomenon on its own terms. It was no accident that Boas linked the affective impulse to *Sturm und Drang* artists, and to Goethe and his observation that "every phenomenon, every fact, is really an interesting object."[39] Boas also traced early ethnography to Joseph and Wilhelm Grimm and their collection of Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, and other tales among European peasants. Although Boas struggled to identify the distinctive quality of specific tribes who borrowed myths ready made, he still gestured to a locative approach to religion studies to understand the genius or spirit of a specific people.

III. Boasian Cultural Anthropology and Negro Folklore

Boas' affective impulse led him to create a new anthropological concept of culture that championed plurality, fluidity, and contingency over and against the singularity, absolutism, and progression. [40] Riffing on the German definition of *Kultur* (Culture), the implication of a Boasian definition of culture was the liberal view that every group has a unique culture and tradition that deserves scientific attention. He understood that ill-informed racial and Western biases framed the comparative and

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[39] Franz Boas, "The Study of Geography," *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic*, 13. Originally published in 1887

[40] George Stocking, "Franz Boas and the Cultural Concept," *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 195-233.

evolutionary perspective of culture/civilization affirmed by Powell and others. In his *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Boas asserted, "It is somewhat difficult for us to recognize that the value which we attribute to our civilization is due to the fact that we participate in this civilization." He further stated, "But it is certainly conceivable that there may be other civilizations, based perhaps on different traditions and on different equilibrium of emotion and reason which are of no less value than ours." Boas' anthropological model of culture was a result of his Jewish identity and of his experiences with prejudice in Germany that made him very suspicious of all nationalisms. Towards the end of his life, he was a staunch critic of Hitler and his use of the Volk logic to inspire the Third Reich and perpetuate the Holocaust during World War II. The Jewish and female identities of his students at Columbia School of Anthropology significantly shaped their liberal politics of cultural differences in the first half of the twentieth century.

By the time Zora Neale Hurston entered the anthropology department at Columbia University in 1925, Boas was the most prominent American anthropologist and his historical ethnology and cultural concept had become a "school of thought" that dominated the field of American anthropology. The "Boasian school" exceeded the crumbling Bureau of Ethnology after Powell's death. Given the significant changes in graduate education in North America in the late nineteenth century, Boas' rise to prominence came along with an increased number of student advisees under his care. These graduate students eventually became leading anthropologists at major universities and colleges such as Columbia, Northwestern, University of California-Berkley, and Harvard. Melville Herskovits noted, "The four decades of the tenure of his professorship at Columbia gave a continuity to his teaching that permitted him to develop students who

eventually made up the greater part of the significant professional core of American anthropologists, and who came to man and direct most of the major departments of anthropology in the United States."[41]

These Columbia–affiliated anthropologists formed a professional network of cultural liberalism and were responsible for advancing the core themes of Boas' ethnology. These core themes were: the significance of environment, diffusion, and cultural pluralism. No doubt, Hurston's interest in the cultural worlds of blacks linked her to the professional network of Boasian cultural liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century. This professional network included Elsie Clews Parson, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Melville Herskovits. These individuals were engaged in intensive fieldwork that laid out the cultural particularities through documenting oral and popular cultures.

Another institution that bore the direct influence of Boas and the Columbia anthropology was the American Folklore Society. Since Boas was one of its founding members, and in turn councilman, president, and associate editor, he was able to use his influence to place his students and colleagues in prestigious positions in this professional society. Elsie Parson, Robert Lowe, and Frank Speck all served as presidents of the Society, and Ruth Benedict served as editor for fifteen years after Boas' retirement in 1924.[42] With Boas as editor, the Society's *Journal of American Folklore* became a medium for his graduate students to publish their dissertations and fieldwork.

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[41] Melville Herskovits, *Franz Boas: Science of Man in the Making* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 65.

[42] Darnell Regna, "American Anthropology and the Development of Folklore Scholarship, 1890-1920," *Journal of Folklore Institute,* Vol. 10, No. 12 (Jun.,-Aug., 1973), 23-39.

As demonstrated in the *Journal of American Folklore*, the Boasian cultural anthropologists inherited this understanding of the importance of folklore and consequently recorded the oral tales, beliefs, and languages of out-of-the way racial and ethnic groups. Folk-ethnography became another medium for the Columbia anthropologists to collectively assert their dominance in the field. To be sure, there was variation among the Columbia affiliated anthropologists, but the core traits that Boas laid out in the late nineteenth century were continued by his students from the 1920s to the 1940s. Similar to Boas, the Columbia affiliated anthropologists were suspicious of grand theories that characterized much of the work of Darwin-influenced social scientists in the nineteenth century. Instead, they emphasized empirical methodology through their style of providing particular vernacular expressions in their exact form. Hurston's professor Ruth Benedict in, "A Matter for the Folk-Worker in Folklore," described how "firsthand observation" helped to overcome the gap between the "lack of correspondence between the statements of folk-lore and the customs and beliefs of the people." She further noted that "no research or theory" could amend the gap. While contemporary scholars critique this faith in descriptivism perpetuated by the Columbia anthropology, their descriptivism was clothed in the view that alternative beliefs, customs, and traditions existed.

Beginning at the time of the World War I, Boas became more vocal about the lack of attention to Negroes in the field of American folklore. In his editorial notes from the twenty-seventh annual of meeting of the American Folklore Society on December 30, 1915, Boas noted that while the Journal had developed folk material for the Indian, English, French, and Spanish in America, now "it seems desirable to take steps to develop the field of Negro Folk-lore" which heretofore "has received only slight

attention."[43] The increasing northward migration of southern Negroes and the perception that the process of urbanization would result in the loss of their unique and popular folk gems furthered triggered his appeal, whose earliest mention we can trace back to his address at the Negro Problem Conference at Atlanta University in 1909. Boas' calls to strengthen the field of Negro folklore flowered amid the New Negro movement that sought artistically to capture the self-determinative spirit of returning black solders after World War I and was further perpetuated by political and labor activity, religious and cultural nationalism, and the politically-tinged migration to the urban centers of North America.[44]

This New Negro movement was a part of American modernism that set the stage for the wider public to accept a version of Boas' anthropological concept of culture, and especially of Negro culture, in popular and commercialized form. By the 1920s, Boas' interest in the field of Negro folk happened within a historical climate where the Negro was in vogue in popular and commercial culture. Boas delegated the responsibility of Negro folklore research to a wealthy and Greenwich Village-affiliated, radical, progressive social scientist named Elsie Parson Clews, who had made the transition from social reform to documenting "Indians and Negroes" in cultural anthropology during World War I.[45] At Barnard, it was her course entitled "Sex in Ethnology" that inspired

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[43] "Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society," in the *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 29, No. 112 (April-June, 1916), pp. 297.

[44] I rely heavily on William Willis assertion that World War I triggered Boas' appeal to strengthen Negro folklore. See: Willis, "Franz Boas and The Study of Black Folklore"

[45] Elsie Clews received her Ph.D. in sociology and education under Henry Franklin at Columbia University. Coming from a long lineage of wealth, she was a radical progressive in advocating a militant pacifism, contraception, women rights, and marriage equality all while married to Democratic politician, What's interesting about her move to folklore was how she framed it while engaged in her anti-war work with progressives such as Randolph Bourne. Her biographer, Rosemary Zumwalt, recorded Parson's letter to her husband (who was fighting in World War I): "Life for a militant pacifist has been rather trying these past months and if I hadn'thad my Zuni notes to write up & no end of Negro folk-tales to edit I'd be worse off

Ruth Benedict to pursue her doctorate in anthropology under Boas. Beginning in 1915, Clews would embark on expeditions to the Bahamas, Nova Scotia, Cape Verde, Bermuda, Barbados, Egypt, Sudan, Florida, and North Carolina to collect folk-tales to develop the field of Negro folklore. Beyond her own work, Parson also traveled to universities and colleges such as Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes to recruit Negro folk-ethnographers imagining that Folk Negroes were more likely to share their intimate worlds with black ethnographers than white ones. One black student Parson recruited was Arthur Fauset, a part-time graduate student in the anthropology department at the University of Pennsylvania. He eventually received his doctorate in anthropology in 1945. In the summer of 1923, Fauset had traveled with Parson to Nova Scotia where they collected the folk-tales and "unspirited stories" (riddles) from "mulattos and half-breeds." Two years after Fauset and Parsons sailed to Nova Scotia, Hurston, a thirty-four year old undergraduate student, entered the Columbia department of anthropology with desire to chronicle the unique cultures of southern Negroes.

Hurston's desire to record southern black cultures was partly inspired by what she called the "pure Negro town" of Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville was crucial to her personal and artistic maturation. Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama in 1891. Her family traveled to the all-black town of Eatonsville that was east of Orlando, one of sixty such all-black towns to emerge after the Civil War.[46] Incorporated on August 15, 1887, Eatonville was the result of freed persons' determination that compelled them to leave their relatively stable lives with white northerners in nearby Maitland and build and

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then I am." Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, *Wealth and Rebellion: Elsie Clews Parson, Anthropologist and Folklorist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 137.

[46] Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), pp. 52.

govern their own town. On the first page of her autobiography, Hurston declared that "Eatonville, Florida, is and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all…"[47] Her father, John Hurston, was not only a locally renowned Baptist pastor, but also mayor of Eatonville. Hurston's earliest recollection on encountering southern and northern whites was when they were passing through the town to either depart from or arrive in Orlando. She noted that she did not know she was colored until she was thirteen years old and attending school in Jacksonville.

Although Eatonville was a geographical place where Hurston spent her childhood and adolescent years, it also operated as an imaginary place indelibly imprinted on her consciousness, a place that animated her romantic quest for the pure Negro cultures best exhibited by southern workers after World War I. Contemporary historian Tiffany Patterson notes, "Throughout her career, much of Hurston's literary and ethnographic work was drawn from Eatonville." Patterson further asserts, "In this she presented an alternative southern experience that made good the promises and possibilities of freedom that Reconstruction failed to deliver."[48] To highlight an alternative representation of southern life outside the horrors of Jim Crow, Patterson captures the intersections between imaginative geography and racial politics that informed Hurston's folk-ethnography. In her article entitled, "How Does It Feel to Be Colored," Hurston notes that her quest was to chronicle the intimate worlds of black workers apart from the surveillance of whites and the brutal system of de facto segregation. She did not want to chronicle black southern experience within the "sobbing school of Negrohood." She

[47] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks On A Road*, pp.1

[48] Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and History of Southern Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), pp. 52.

noted, ”I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a low down, dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it…No, I do not weep at the world, I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.”[49]

Hurston came with this racial politics to the anthropology department at Columbia University. She must have been overjoyed to find that the Boasian anthropology she learned supported and affirmed her passion to search for black cultural particularity free from the presuppositions of race-relations research. In two short stories that she published on black hoodoo and conjure cultures in black Florida, spiritual expression was an important location of the genius of the southern black working-class beyond race-relations studies. Her folk-ethnography sought for “pearls in pigpens” and to improve the field of Negro folklore like Papa Franz did with the study of Native Indians. Although Boas and Parsons were more concerned with discovering the exact origins of Negro folklore than was Hurston, they expectantly looked to the woman who wore southern culture like a “tight garment” to save the struggling field of Negro folklore.[50]

III. Hurston and Black Paganism

Hurston’s decision to study the spiritual traditions in the rural and urban South occurred within the “religious diversification” of industrial America. According to Hans Baer and Merill Singer, “African American religion underwent a rapid process of

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[49] Zora Hurston, “How Does It Feel To Be Colored,” in *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 12, 1928

[50] Hurston described her unconsciousness regarding her southern culture before the “spy-glass of Anthropology.” Hurston noted, “But it [folk tales] was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it.” Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990), 1. Originally published in 1935.

diversification in the early decade of the twentieth century, particularly with the appearance of a wide array of new Holiness, Pentecostal, Spiritual, Islamic, and Judaic sects."[51] Throughout the early twentieth-century, many urban cities such as Chicago, New York, Detroit, Atlanta, and New Orleans experienced an explosion of spiritual, sanctified, or cultic faiths due to the influx of black southern migrants and Caribbean immigrants. Like many European immigrants, these black southern migrants and Caribbean immigrants were inspired to take advantage of the economic boom sparked by World War I.

Hurston studied in the anthropology department at Columbia University while the religious landscape was changing in Harlem. In this sense, the diverse religious faiths, along with speakeasies, cabarets, rent-parties, and dinner socials, added to Harlem's allure in the Roaring Twenties. Writer Claude McKay observed the "innumerable cults, mystic chapels, and occult shops in Harlem." A young James Baldwin frequented Father Divine's Peace Missions to purchase food for an affordable price during the hard times of the Great Depression.[52] This was before Baldwin, with the assistance of Mother Rosa Horn, discovered his "gimmick" as a boy preacher in the Pentecostal circuit in Harlem.[53] Langston Hughes also frequented the Harlem scene where he witnessed the jazz bands, gospel blues, and a flamboyant pastor, George Becton at Salem Methodist Episcopal Church on Seventh Avenue.

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[51] Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, "Religious Diversification during the Era of Advanced Industrial Capitalism," reprinted in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie Glaude (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2003), 495.

[52] James Baldwin, "Dark Days," *Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's,), 660.

[53] James Baldwin, *A Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 24-25.

By the late 20s, Harlem was a diverse religious marketplace where city-dwellers and tourists could pick from a range of faiths at places such as Abyssinian Baptist Church, Beth B'Nai Abraham Temple, Metaphysical Club of the Divine Investigation, the Church of the Temple of Love, and others. Hurston partook in this religious environment, and once invited her wealthy patron, Charlotte "Godmother" Mason, to visit a revival service to experience the primitive vitality of pure Negro culture that Mason so craved. For Hurston, the testimonies, call-and-response, shouting, tuning sermons, and jagged spirituals in the small churches in Harlem took her down "memory lane" to her childhood in Florida. Although she personally renounced the Protestant faith of her father, she enjoyed the cultural expressions in the revival meetings.[54]

Although often overlooked in contemporary literature was the religious diversification significantly altered modern social sciences in the first half of the twentieth century. There were social scientists who strongly felt that the 1926 *Federal Census of Religious Bodies* was too conservative in how it defined "religion" and caused U.S. bureaucrats to overlook these emerging popular "sects and cults." Social scientist Benjamin Mays noted that he could not sanction the report's failure to document the storefront churches, because "there are too many of the storefronts churches for them to be completely ignored."[55] Throughout the '30s and '40s, articles and theses highlighted these "unorthodox" religious movements: E.B. Palmer's *Elder Michaux and His Church of God: A Sociological Interpretation*, Andrew W. Polk's Primitive *Religion Among Negroes in Tennessee*, Robert Scott Kenon's *Sociological Analysis of A Religious Cult:*

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[54] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks On A Road* (New York: Harpers Collins Publishers, 1995), 217-232.

[55] Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson, *The Negro Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), 200.

The Temple of Israel Spiritualist Church, and Arthur Fauset's *Black Gods of the Metropolis*.

For these social scientists, the growing spiritual and sanctified faiths provided a window into the changing character of race and class spawned by industrial capitalism. These religious movements were interpreted as empirical data on the emerging black underclass inhabiting the ghettos in a manufacturing and consumer-based economy. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier understood that urban religious expressions were a repository of these new labor and class divisions within the black community. Thus, the growing spiritual, Holiness, Pentecostal, and Baptist storefronts reflected the rising urban class of semi-skilled and unskilled laborers. Around the time Hurston was studying in the anthropology department at Columbia, *Opportunity* released Ira De A. Reid's essay in which he stressed his concerns about the rising "small church movement" and its encroachment on the Protestant establishment in Harlem.[56] The so-called encroachment of these small churches was largely attributed to selfish charlatans and exploiters who made it difficult for mainline churches to serve the Harlem community. For Reid, these small churches were a hinderance to the religious order of established Protestant churches that were "rendering a valuable service to the community due to the unselfishness and broad-mind ministers."[57] Unlike these Protestant denominations, these house churches seemed to modify the adage, "Let Us Pray" to "Let Us Prey."

The growing spiritualist churches and stores were targets in Reid's essay on charlatans and exploiters. Undergirding Reid's critique of these con artists was the presupposition about the spiritual vulnerability of the emerging black underclass. While

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[56] Ira De A. Reid, "Let Us Prey," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (September, 1926), 274-78.
[57] Ibid, 277.

Reid briefly acknowledged the sincere mediums and spiritualists, he preferred to flood his essay with images of the desolate black underclass that was at the mercy of these charismatic leaders posing as spiritualist mediums to deceased relatives. Due to their plight, the black underclass was also vulnerable to the self-proclaimed healing and prophetic powers of spiritualists. He described a man, who had tears streaming down his face, give what appeared to be his last two dollars to a large man claiming to be a medium communicating with the man's dead relative. As the "fat man" shook with convulsions, Reid noted that during his trickery he failed to "mention just what relative it was."[58] Against the backdrop of a consumerist economy, Reid furthered articulated that these spiritual institutions highlighted the gullibility of the black underclass that was susceptible to these self-proclaimed spiritual mediums who "charged large fees and worked with all the paraphernalia of these professionals."[59] The black underclass fell prey to the dramatic performances of these con artists, and their convulsions and "act of receiving their spiritual messages in the dark [with] various ways of speaking through collapsible triumphs."[60]

The spiritual vulnerability of the black underclass and their suspension of good judgment were presumably exacerbated by deep worry and sorrow. Other critics attributed the popularity of sects and cults to the black underclass' desire to escape the "cities of destruction." Hurston's former professor at Howard University, Kelley Miller, ascribed the popularity of Father Divine, the self-appointed God, and his "burlesque religion" to his congregants' socioeconomic plight that contributed to their "spiritual

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[58] Ibid, 277.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

lag."[61] At the height of the migration, sociologists felt that rural southern culture was a repository of supernatural and overly emotional religious comportments that gave these spiritual and sanctified faiths a regional appeal. These small churches were depicted as out of touch with the norms and values of industrial society.

Unlike many social scientists, Hurston did not interpret the growing spiritualists or sanctified faiths as necessarily an "opiate of the people and a cry of the oppressed." Instead, she understood that these spiritualists and sanctified institutions were products of southern black migrants and their efforts to maintain and at the same time recreate their folkways within modern society. Through her eyes, the small church movement did not emerge from the underclass' socioeconomic lag and psychological disillusionment. Instead, it represented a conscientious revolt against what she felt was the American Protestant order or "theology of the nation" that did not cater to the specific cultural expressions of southern migrants. Armed with a Boasian anthropological concept of culture, Hurston entered the field with a desire to salvage the cultural specificity of black spiritual practices in the Gulf Coast. The Gulf Coast and the Sea Islands were goldmines for Boasian cultural anthropologists looking to salvage Negro folk cultures. Melville Herskovits noted that regions that lay west of the Mississippi River, especially Louisiana, were a special case for ethnographers interested in salvaging Africanism in the religious cultures of Negroes in the New World.[62] Hurston noted that the spiritual practice of hoodoo and conjure has had its highest development along the Gulf Coast, particularly in

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61 Kelley Miller, "editorial," *Christian Century* (December, 1935), *The Kelley Miller Papers* , MARBL, Emory University.

62 Melville Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 245.

the city of New Orleans."[63] With the geographical location of Gulf Coast and Sea Islands, Hurston countered her literary colleague, Jean Toomer's Swan Song or claim that the "Folk-spirit was walking to die on the modern desert."[64]

Similar to Boas' affective disposition, Hurston wanted to capture the unique southern religious phenomenon on its own terms. Before salvaging the unique folk paganism of black religion, Hurston was forced to contend with the municipal laws and ordinances designed to obliterate the spiritual practices of conjure and hoodoo in twentieth-century New Orleans. She was sensitive to how religion was a synecdoche for administering laws to maintain order and regulate behavior. This sensitivity to the laws and prohibitions separated Hurston from her colleagues Herskovits, Parsons, and other Boasian cultural anthropologists. When she arrived for the first time at the aging pink house of the seventy-year old Hoodoo spiritualist, "Luke Turner" (or "Samuel Thompson,") Hurston wanted to work under Turner as an apprentice and undergo the process of initiation of spiritual empowerment. The seventy-year hoodoo doctor was dismissive of Hurston and rejected her request. She understood that the New Orleans ordinances against "fortune-tellers, hoodoo doctors, and the like contributed to his response to her request. Hurston summed up, "I could see he had no faith in my sincerity."[65]

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[63] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," *Journal of American Folklore* (October-December, 1931), 318.
[64] Jean Toomer, *The Wayward and Seeking* (Washington: Darwin T. Turner and Marjorie Content, 1980), 123.
[65] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 191-192. Turner was Thompson in "Hoodoo In America,"

During Hurston's ethnographic research in 1928, these municipal laws were "replacements, modifications, or an update from their nineteenth-century counterparts."[66] By the mid to late nineteenth century, a series of ordinances was administered to ban the right to sell medicines or "therapeutic treatments" without proper licenses; assemble in public places without a proper authorization; and engage in disorderly conduct, such as nudity and loitering.[67] These aforementioned bans targeted these Voodoo practitioners who administered cures (and poisons) for a price, and were intended to punish their supposed engagement in lewd and erotic dance rituals in the Congo Square or Lake Pontchartrain in the nineteenth-century after the Louisiana Purchase. Whereas emerging social anthropologists lingered on the relationship between spiritual practices and laws of society, Hurston was more invested in the way in which black hoodoo practitioners and spiritualists creatively navigated the repressive laws to maintain their paganisms at the same time as being engaged in "legitimate forms of religion." Hurston observed how hoodoo or conjure doctors (and sanctified members) wedded their illegal spirituals practices to state or city legal or standard religions to maintain their folk paganisms. This bridge between illegal and legal; illegitimate and legitimate; repressed and standard forms of religions was most evident in the spiritual churches in New Orleans.

To be sure, the spiritualist movement was nothing new in North American history. The spiritual movement began in the northern part of a country on the brink of what would be the bloodiest battle on American soil in the nineteenth century. What began as a "mysterious knockings and strange rappings" interpreted as ghostly visitations translated into a popular movement where northerners yearned to communicate with the

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[66] Alphonse Roberts, *The Promise of Power: The Racial, Gender, and Economic Politics of Voodoo in New Orleans, 1881-1940* (Chicago: Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012), 65.
[67] Ibid.

dead and spiritual world through séances and mediums.[68] This yearning to commune with the dead was sparked by the high death toll during the Civil War; individuals found solace in the spirits of deceased loved ones. Mary Todd Lincoln dealt with her husband's assassination through spiritualism. Hurston was not particularly invested in understanding the relationship between nineteenth-century American spiritualism and twentieth-century Black spiritual churches. She desired to preserve the uniqueness of the latter. Hurston claimed that the "dead, and communication with the dead play a traditionally large part in Negro religions." She further commented, "[w]hatever West African beliefs have survived in the New World, this place of the dead has been maintained."[69] Hurston was more invested in teasing out the relationship between spiritualism and the Hoodoo and conjure that was unique to New Orleans culture. She noted, "Spiritualism, as a technique for communication with the dead, has ready appeal to the black, and is often closely combined with hoodoo practices."[70] Hurston understood spiritualism as a way in which hoodoo and conjure practitioners negotiated the illegal and legal boundaries of religion and culture in New Orleans. Since the spiritual churches were partly legitimated by the city authorities, it created room for hoodoo and conjure practitioners to preserve those Haitian and creole practices considered illegal. Hurston noted, "A spiritualistic name protects the congregation, and is a useful devise of protective coloration."[71]

Hurston arrived in New Orleans a year after the death of the founder of the first spiritualist church in New Orleans, Mother Leafy Anderson. Hurston attended the first

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[68] Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 61; Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (San Franisco: Harper Collins Books, 2002), 199-202.

[69] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 319.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

church called the Eternal Life Church established by Mother Anderson and left to her niece, Mother Amelia Price. The *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote that Eternal Life Church was one of the twenty churches that Mother Anderson founded in major cities and towns such as Pittsburgh, Chicago, Houston, Biloxi, Indiana Harbor, Memphis, and Forest City.[72] At times dressed in a white gown with "gold crosses on her neck and waist" or a single gold necklace bearing her devotion to the spirit of Black Hawk, Anderson communed with the living spirits that enabled her to heal and prophesy. Hurston noted that Mother Anderson detested any affiliation with Hoodoo. She noted, "Mother Leafy Anderson was not a hoodoo doctor in the phrase of her church." In fact, she stated that Anderson's eleven other churches were "stolen by hoodoo doctors."[73] The New Orleans City Guide described these [spiritual] churches as "organized by self-appointed leaders, usually women, who claim to commune with the spirits and proclaim to practice faith healing."[74]

Unfortunately, Hurston did not engage the alleged report that Anderson was arrested on one occasion for holding a Voodoo meeting on a fish fry permit.[75] Nor does Hurston note that Anderson's churches were all organized under the name, the Eternal Christian Spiritualist Churches. The arrest and "Christian" designation may bolster Hurston's claims about the porous lines between spiritualism and hoodoo that implicated Mother Anderson and other spiritual leaders in New Orleans. But Hurston's focus on Mother Anderson's denouncement of any association with hoodoo tradition captured the reports that Mother Anderson was overly preoccupied with law enforcement that

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[72] "Pay Respect to Mother Anderson," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Dec. 27, 1927), 8.

[73] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 318-320.

[74] Federal Writer's Project, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), 83

[75] Alphonso Roberts, *The Promise of Power*

compelled her to have the Eternal Spiritual Church to be chartered. After Anderson's death, the legitimated spiritualist churches also allowed room for the illegal or repressed spiritual practices of conjure to persist and flourish. For instance, it was reported that Mother Anderson had all the protocols of a Christian worship service, such as the hymns, reading of biblical scriptures, and prayers. Yet, she recycled "Christian" rituals to call on pagan spirits in order to engage in healing and prophecy. She trained "Mothers and Fathers" to find the pagan spirits while reading the bible.

Underneath the chartered or legitimated Eternal Spiritual Christian Life Church, Hurston was attentive to how the decorated altars had pictures of Mother Anderson and the "Spirit Uncle" with the sand bucket to hold the burning candles and holy water. In fact, one of Mother Anderson's disciples, Mother C.J. Hyde, merged spiritualism and conjure. To avoid trouble, Mother Hyde told Hurston to "arise at dawn and face east. Take vial of spirit oil in one hand and the cake in the other. And read the 23 Psalms as a petition."[76] Mother Hyde's sacred formula was an illustration of the ways in which spiritualists merged illegal spiritual practices and legal Christian symbols to preserve their paganisms. In Florida, Hurston also observed the preservation of paganisms in the Protestant sanctified churches. The ornate altars, shouting, and the preoccupation with sounds and motion underscore primitive Negroes' protest against the highbrow tendencies in Negro Protestant congregations. In her ethnography, the southern Negroes were not completely "Christianized" in the traditional American sense, because their Protestant affiliation bolstered their diffusive pagan altars and their calling old gods by a new

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[76] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 320.

name."[77] For instance, she interpreted that shouting in the Church of God in Christ was a survival of the African possession by the gods."[78]I will come back to folklore and African-derived religions later.

The "two-headed doctors" that Hurston studied under in New Orleans clearly demonstrated this creative diffusion between the legal and illegal. Due to the French history of colonial Louisiana, many of the Hoodoo doctors were Catholics. In this sense, these conjure and hoodoo practitioners converted Christianity to their own specific and alternative spiritual epistemologies and magical practices. It was the custom to hear that the beginnings of hoodoo and conjure could be found in the Old Testament creation myths or Moses' divine rod that was used to usher in the plagues to free the Hebrews from Egyptian captivity. Hurston retold the creation myth: "Six days of magic spells and mighty works and the world with its elements above and below was made."[79] These Catholic hoodoo doctors believed that sacred figures such as Jesus or Moses were not divine exceptions; instead the biblical myths confirmed their belief that power could be transmitted to hoodoo practitioners and enable them to create and fix the material realities that multiple subjects such as fathers, mothers, lovers, children, gamblers, rent-payers, adversaries, and friends faced on a day-to-day basis. These everyday realities they addressed with sacred words, rituals, objects, and formulas. In this sense, the spiritual and material worlds were inseparable. By listing the petitions directly, Hurston sought to intimately humanize the community of Hoodoo practitioners and believers who care and worried about their marriages, relationships, families, finances, health, betrayal, and

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[77] Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (New York: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), 103.
[78] Ibid, 91.
[79] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men,* 183-85.

dignity. Hoodoo was not outside the everyday worlds that these multiple subjects inhabited in New Orleans. Hurston learned all sorts of sacred formulas for dealing with everyday problems such as Mother Ruth Mason's formula for "bringing back a man or woman who had left his or her mate."[80]

What was interesting was how Hurston documented her initiation experiences where the hoodoo doctors fused Catholic and pagan rituals to transmit the power of the spirits to her. Similar to the Boasian cultural anthropologists, Hurston was not necessarily given to imputing meaning into the sacred rituals and formulas that the hoodoo doctors used. Instead, she simply detailed the exact rituals, prayers, formulas, and material objects to indirectly make her case about the blending of Catholicism and specific folk paganism in New Orleans. She intended to outline her initiation process in a fully descriptive format to capture how the cultural particularity of paganism altered Catholicism in a particular geographical location. She made references to how these hoodoo Catholics reused the "altar, the candles, the incense, the holy water, and blessed oil of the Catholic church and include them with "herbs, reptiles, insects, etc."[81]

After the "Great One" communicated to "Samuel Thompson" (or Luke Turner) that Hurston was to return the next day to undergo her intensive initiation process, Hurston noted that she arrived the next morning where Thompson had prepared the altar with lit candles and sat them upon tumblers filled with honey, three filled with syrup, three with the holy water, and set them in a semi-circle upon the altar. Similarly Hurston noted that after the Catholic hoodoo doctor, Alfred Frechard, prepared a tub of warm water for her, he rolled a pink candle around the tub three times and prayed, "in nomina

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[80] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 371. Ruth Mason is "Kitty Brown" in Mules and Men.
[81] Ibid.

patria, et filia, et spiritu santus, Amen." This standard prayer was one of the ritualistic processes designed to prepare his novitiate, Hurston, to welcome and commune with the Spirit of Moccasin and others such as Kangaroo, Jenipee, and Death. After Frechard bathed his novitiate in the water, Hurston put on new underwear, covered herself with an oil of geranium, and lay down on the couch, where she read the third chapter of Job every morning and night for nine days.

Like their Catholic counterparts, Black Protestants also continued to engage in folk hoodoo. Hurston discovered Dr. Grant, a "two-headed doctor," who belonged to a small Protestant community. Grant was a root-doctor and specialized in court cases. He once commanded Hurston to come to the jail and assist one of his clients. Dr. Grant had "dressed" the Bible and instructed his client to read the 35th Psalm every day until she went to trail. Of course, the merging of hoodoo paganism and Protestantism was a common trait among black communities along the Mississippi Delta. Folk-sociologist Niles Newbell Puckett documented that Protestants were known to engage in works, jacks, trickery, and roots such as "Ed Murphy" who used a host of sacred medicines to cure and harm others. "Ed Murphy concocted medicinal medicines such as the "bowels of Christ or "king of the woods") or harm ("Devil's snuff").[82]

Hurston's accounts of these pagan hoodoo rituals and practices that altered Christianity recorded the folk genius of southerners in New Orleans that race-relation sociologists often overlooked. She was unwilling to interpret these hoodoo practices and rituals to validate their deficiency in light of the standard norms of American industrialization. She affirmed the spiritual practices of hoodoo and conjure on its own

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[82] Niles Newbell Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 58.

terms. Due to her participatory observation, at times her desire to validate folk paganism left her speechless and vulnerable to psychic alteration. For three days and nights, Hurston waited on possession of the "Great One," that eventually caused her to undergo five psychic experiences" . These psychic experiences confirmed that the "Great One" had accepted her by the sixty-ninth hour. For Hurston, the cultural specificity of folk paganism among spiritualists and hoodoo doctor was the result of the history of Haitians and Creoles who came to the French colony, Louisiana, with their distinct spiritual traditions in the eighteenth century.

Hurston felt that the spiritual practices of Haitians and Creoles were "predominantly African." She encountered hoodoo doctors who understood their spiritual practices as continuing in the legacy of their Haitian ancestors. The memory of Haiti was etched on the consciousness of the spiritualists and conjurers, and made hoodoo a gateway to the African past. Melville Herskovits asserted that the unique historical background of Haitian planters, slaves, and creoles, coupled with French Catholicism gave New Orleans its unique religious context. Stephen Thompson told Hurston that, "his remote ancestors brought the power with them from the rock (Africa) and that his forebears lived in Santo Domingo before they came to the region of New Orleans."[83] Yet it was the memory of the great nineteenth-century Voodoo Queen, Marie Leveau, that set the spiritual pretext for the continuation of hoodoo and folk paganism among twentieth-century spiritualists, hoodoo practitioners, and two-headed doctors. Hurston admitted that she was unsure about how twentieth-century hoodoo stemmed from Leveau. Yet she chronicled how myths about the Voodoo Queen invaded present-day New Orleans.

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[83] Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 357.

To legitimate their own powers and works, both Thompson and Fetchard claimed that they were kin to Leveau, despite their lack of shared physical traits. Still they counted themselves spiritually affiliated with her works. As a sign of his spiritual kinship with Leveau, Stephen Thompson, carried the snakeskin (Grand Zombi) that purportedly accompanied Leveau. Legend says that the Grand Zombi disappeared in the woods once Leveau died near Lake Pontchartrain.

In New Orleans, Hurston noted that the persistent legends and myths associated Leveau with the "traditional era of hoodoo" and its "Golden Age." She noted that her "glory had not suffered with time despite little contemporary record of her."[84] The *New Journal and Guide* reported that on St. John Eve's day (June 23rd) thousands visited Leveau's purported tomb at the St. Louis Cemetery in New Orleans.[85] According to the author, many Negroes and whites believed that if they scratched a cross on the nameless tomb on St. John Eve, and prayed to Voodoo's Gran Zombi, Pitt Zombi, and Marie Leveau, they would get whatever they asked for before next year's St. John Eve. In the FWP's *New Orleans City Guide*, the authors reported that petitioners deposited coins on her grave so that her spirit could answer their prayers.[86] Though George Catlin's painting of Leveau hangs in the Louisiana State Museum, her true skin pigmentation, appearance, birth, legitimacy, and death were shrouded in mystery and conflict.

Hurston accepted the commonly held view that the Voodoo Queen was a member of the "free persons of color" with curly hair underneath her bright tignons draped with extensive jewels. Hurston recorded the myths regarding the huge rattlesnake (Li Grand

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84 Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo In America," 327

85 "Remembered Queen," *Norfolk Journal and Guide* (September 16, 1933), 3.

86 Federal Writer's Project, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), 65.

Zombi) that accompanied her and the mass that included Voodoo dances in the Congo Square and Lake Pontchartrain, particularly on first Fridays. To be sure, Hurston was knowlegable about the special power that Leveau possessed. Thompson told Hurston that police raided Leveau's house on St. Anne Street and found themselves running and barking like dogs, beating each other with bell clubs, or sleeping. The whole police department was at her mercy. Leveau was the spiritual bridge that connected spiritual and conjure practitioners to the traditional African past. It was the bridge that constituted for Hurston the unique hoodoo culture continued by Negroes in the Gulf Coast. Through her own participant-observation methodology, Hurston became a part of the African-derived spiritual world that was directly linked to her anthropological concept of culture. This anthropological concept of culture united her to a cadre of cultural anthropologists trained under Boas at Columbia University. With this concept of culture, Hurston detected what she felt were the African-influenced paganisms that animated Negroes' various Christian rituals. Her ethnography of these folk paganisms in New Orleans was free from privileging the rational and ethical model of religion that American sociologists posited.

Conclusion

After New Orleans, Hurston traveled to the Bahamas and Haiti to collect folklore. Hurston had an interest in obtaining a graduate degree in anthropology under Boas at Columbia University. In a letter to Boas, Hurston began with the news that she had received the Rosenwald fellowship that would enable her to "return to Columbia and work for [her] doctorate."[87] Boas supported her pursuit. Hurston outlined for the

[87] Zora Neale Hurston, *A Life In Letters,* 326.

Rosenwald president, Edwin Embree, that first Boas was sending her to work with Melville Herskovits to study French at Northwestern. Hurston explained the rationale for her work with Herskovits on the basis that he had done more work on Negro subjects than any other American anthropologist. It would have been more suitable for Hurston to work with Herskovits at Northwestern than Boas in the first place.

The work with Herskovits never happened. Although she attended courses with Boas at Columbia University, Hurston was never able to complete the degree. On January 21, 1935, Embree rescinded her two-year fellowship on the grounds that she had not shown "a sufficiently exacting plan of work."[88] By this time, Hurston was a celebrity and at the pinnacle of her writing career in the literary and commercial world. Her fame would last well into the forties with the publication of her novel. By 1935, the forty-four year old Hurston had signed a contract with the popular trade press, Lippincott Company, and went on to publish her fieldwork on Florida and New Orleans in *Mules and Men.* She would also produce a folk play, "Singing Steel", and publish a novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine.* Pursuing a doctorate degree where she was required to take "rigorous courses [that] would not have any bearing on [her] field" proved more of a hindrance or distraction to her goal of recording the folk spiritualties of the diasporic Negro in Haiti and Jamaica. She was able to take advantage of the commercial, federal, and general public's fascination with Negro folk cultures that did necessarily require a Ph.D., or scientific knowledge about diffusion of cultures. For a mature woman who knew financial struggle firsthand, it certainly was not worth the tuition cost.

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[88] Ibid, 342. Embree wrote the letter on January 21, 1935.

By the late 30s and into the 40s, Negro folklore had never really progressed ground in the field of anthropology in the way that Boas and Parson had envisioned. Financial struggles impeded the progress of Negro Folk-ethnography. William Willis purports that "Boas never got a large governmental grant or foundation grant to pursue a systematic study of Negro folklore. Willis went on to note that the financial straits probably accounted for why Boas' students, except for Herskovits, did not pursue blacks studies in the United States.[89] The lack of support from foundations and federal government to fund a systematic study of Negro folklore was directly related to the somewhat waning influence of the Boasian model in the field of anthropology. While Boas' contribution to untangling race from biological traits helped to ground a liberal intellectual consensus beginning in the thirties, emerging social anthropologists were steadily growing impatient with salvaging the so-called songs, dances, languages, and spiritual practices of traditional or pre-modern groups. Salvage ethnography failed to attend to modern social structures that shaped and restricted cultural institutions and behaviors in specific locations. Social anthropologist Allison Davis championed Boas' efforts to make anthropology an empirical science and environmental determinism. But Davis, along with Boas' former students, Kroeber and Redfield, argued that Boas' historical ethnology and its attention to the local overlooked larger trends of modern society. Davis noted that while the emphasis in historical reconstruction was an important contribution, modern anthropology must provide a penetrating study of the individual under the stress of the [dominant and macro] culture in which [they] live.[90] For social anthropologists, Boas' quest for the intimate and "homely" life of the Negroes in these

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[89] William S. Willis, "Franz Boas and the Study of Folklore," 25-26.

[90] Allison Davis, "Review of *Race and Culture* by Franz Boas," *Phylon,* Vol. 2, No. 1 (First Quarter, 1941), 93.

settings uncontaminated by whites civilization underscored a "narrow view of the sociocultural environment" that excluded discussion of the "whole segregated black community" and the "dominant white people." Parson decried what she called the speculative "caste and class" trend in anthropology. Parson's former folklorist comrade, Arthur Fauset, had to accommodate the changes in anthropology and locate a middle ground between cultural particularity and the larger political and economic realities in the mid forties.

Allison Davis was a part of the rising "caste and class" anthropological school that gained prominence in the New Deal era, specifically at Harvard University and then the University of Chicago. He would eventually become the first black professor at the University of Chicago in 1942. This new caste and class school of anthropology was attributed to William Lloyd Warner, who was professor of anthropology and sociology at the University of Chicago in 1935. Influenced by A.R. Radcliffe Brown and British social anthropology, Warner turned his anthropological gaze from studying "out-of-the-way" primitives to the racial and class dynamic in modern communities. Warner stated, "We (social anthropologists) feel justified in being just as much interested in the life of our modern American communities as some of our colleagues are in the peculiar practices of the polyandrous Toda."[91] He advised his black and white students doing research in Natchez, Mississippi to understand the new social order, the "caste and class system," that developed out of the plantation system of the Old South. This study led to the publication of *The Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* in 1941.

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91 W. Lloyd Warner, "Introduction," *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*, Allision Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 3.

Hurston's search for the intimate or the unique spiritual practices of southern Negroes gave way to Davis' investigation of the intra-racial and class factors in the Jim Crow South. While at Dillard University, Davis conducted an ethnographic study of the religious cultures in New Orleans for the Gunnar Myrdal-Carnegie Foundation study of the Negro Problem in the late 30s. One of his discoveries was that the spiritual behaviors of both lower-class whites and blacks were quite uniform. Davis noted that the normally strict caste systems between the lower-class whites and Negroes were weak in the Spiritualist and Holiness churches. Contra Hurston, Davis attended to the interracial dimension of the spiritual practices in the New Orleans that Hurston briefly mentioned. Davis noted that in New Orleans he observed lower-class whites paying Negro spiritualists twenty-five to fifty-cents each to have their futures read.[92] In one instance, most of the Negro fortune-tellers' clientele were upper-class white women. Thus, whites also helped in legitimizing spiritual practices of blacks.

By focusing on the interracial dynamic of the spiritual practices in New Orleans, Davis was exposing another history to New Orleans that was outside of Hurston's ethnology. This history was included in the memories of Marie Leveau and Mother Leafy Anderson, and their white following. One myth was that Leveau, a Creole, prevented Negroes from attending and participating in these rituals with her wealthy white clientele. In the mid and late nineteenth century, major American newspapers' and journals' coverage vilified hoodoo culture on the basis of its interracial character. For instance, critics were more troubled that the so-called orgies and sexual perversity at the Voodoo dances in the Congo Square or near Lake Pontchartrain were interracial, particularly with

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[92] Allison Davis, "The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South," unpublished, *Carnegie-Myrdal Study*, *The Allison Davis Papers* 1932-1984), University of Chicago Archive, 42.

Negro men and respectable white women. In the *Youth Companion*, we read that Marie Williams was horrified to hear that the Voodoo dance ritual featured forty to fifty white and black women and men tearing off their garments while the Voodoo Queen stood near the boiling pot.[93] The *Los Angeles Times* ran a sensationalized story of eight white women between the ages of eighteen and fifty who were arrested for engaging in a hoodoo dance incantation at the house of a "half-Indian and Negro" conjure doctor. While the women sincerely expressed that they had full confidence in the hoodoo practitioners' power to relieve their suffering through the dance ritual, the image of seven Negro men lying on the floor partly "clad," while both black and white women stood around without much apparel was a "strange and disgusting sight for the police officers."[94] In his fieldwork, Niles Puckett retold a story from the late nineteenth century that told of respectable white women frequenting and participating in Voodoo rituals and ceremonies.

For Davis, hoodoo threatened the racial codes meant to maintain white superiority and black inferiority in twentieth-century New Orleans. Davis noted, "In New Orleans, a Negro Spiritualist female preacher (a "Mother") was charged in police court with holding services in which Negroes and whites participated freely."[95] He further documented that the "white judge directed her to go uptown and serve you and let these white people serve their God." Another Negro spiritualist preacher was arrested and fined for reading the future to a white woman. Negro spiritualist men and white southern women violated the caste orders that were designed to relegate the potential union of white southern women and black men. The practice of endogamy was a central feature in the caste system in the

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93 Marie Williams, *Youth Champion,* Vol. 34 (August 26, 1875), 271-2.
94 "Voodoo Orgies: White Women Arrested for Taking Part in Them," *The Los Angles Times*, (May 31, 1884), 4.
95 Allison Davis, "The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South, " 32.

Jim Crow south. In the end, these spiritualists and hoodoo culture challenged the Jim Crow laws and restrictions.

Davis' preoccupation with race relations dominated the world of social science and federal and philanthropic funding beginning in the late 30s. This emphasis on caste and class was fitting for a society worried about the racial situation at home and abroad in Nazi Germany. The search for the intimate and unique religions and cultures in their locality faded from the social scientific study of the Negro problem. Hurston released herself from her dreams of pursuing the doctoral degree in anthropology and set her sights on using the commercial culture to reclaim the genius of southern Negro culture. Although she died in obscurity, her pride in the particularities of Negro culture would continue in a different form with the black cultural nationalists and cultural left in the late sixties and seventies. Known as the "genius of the South," Hurston's genius lay in her anthropological concept of culture that examined the spiritual world of blacks on their own terms.

Chapter 4

Alan Lomax's Romanticism and the Quest for that Old-Time Religion

Give me that old time religion
Give me that old time religion
Give me that old time religion
It's good enough for me
Hymn

Fisk University and the Library of Congress collaborated on the "Folk Culture Study in Coahoma County (Mississippi)," at the height of World War II. The project was a full-scale and intensive field study on the function of musical culture and tradition within the social and economic background of blacks living in the Mississippi Delta.[1] One of the results of the study was the discovery of several blues musicians, including guitarist McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, whom the researchers found on Stovall's plantation in Clarksdale, Mississippi. At the time of the study, it was reported that Waters had a desire to "join" a church, but the idea of having to give up the so-called "devil's instrument," his guitar, was not a sacrifice that he was willing to make. Muddy Water's internal dilemma captured the close but contentious relationship between Afro-American evangelical and blues cultures in the Mississippi Delta.[2] Choosing his blues guitar over

[1] There is a debate in the literature about how the research project actually started. Lomax accredited himself as the primary architect of the study. See: Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: The New York Press, 1993). Lomax stated, "Charles Johnson, the head of sociology at Fisk, liked my notion of doing a study of an urbanizing cotton country as a way of accessing the continued importance of tradition [xii]. But, recent literature has emerged that John W. Work, a Fisk University musicologist, was responsible for the idea of the study due to his interest in the music and memorial around a fire that killed two hundred African Americans in Natchez, Mississippi on April 23, 1940. He presented the idea initially to Fisk University's President, Thomas E. Jones. See: *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-42*, eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2005).

[2] The relationship between evangelical Protestant and blues culture was quite complicated in the Mississippi Delta. While Lomax noted the small feelings in the spirituals and blues, he also documented their contentious relationship. While in Mississippi, he visited mother of Little Robert

the evangelical church, Waters recorded on Chess Records and contributed to the folk revivalist movement after World War II.[3]

On one occasion during the study, Library of Congress's Alan Lomax and Fisk University sociologist Lewis "Looey" Jones attended a state Baptist convention to observe and record a religious service at First African Baptist Church in Clarksdale, Mississippi. The local communities referred to Clarksdale as the "New World" due to its vibrant business distinct and commercial infrastructure.[4] Seated in the top balcony, Lomax set up his government-loaned equipment, which included a huge microphone and recording machine that he held over the pulpit in order to capture the various sound expressions. Once the robed choir sung a "conventional hymn," a disgusted Lomax immediately turned off the recording machine. He was anticipating the spontaneous and spirit-filled songs that gripped his imagination on his first field expedition in 1933. His anticipation was fueled by the new state of the art amplifier, microphones, acetate, and

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Johnson, the exceptional blues guitarist of Tunica County, Mississippi. His mother told Alan that her son was dead. Yet the circumstances around his death captured the tension between religion and blues. According to Ms. Johnson, she constantly warned her son about the dangers in playing the devils instruments. In her words, supposedly some "wicked girl or her boyfriend" poisoned him. She went to where he was laying in a bed and waiting for her to arrive. She said, "Soon her saw me, he say say Mama, you all I been waitin for. Here, he say, and he give me his guitar, take and hang this thing on the wall, cause I done pass all that by….It's the devil's instrument, just like you said. And I don't wait it no more [15]." As Ms. Johnson narrated this part, she had a religious experience. This was one of many field recording that captured the divide between evangelical Protestantism and blues culture in the 2oth century.

On the other hand, Mississippi natives, Muddy Waters, B.B. King and C.L. Franklin both said they grew up listening to both religious and secular music on the phonograph. See: Nick Salvatore, *C.L. Franklin, The Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York: Little, Brown Company, 2005), 29-30.

[3] Muddy Waters played at Carnegie Hall for a concert organized by Alan Lomax in 1959.

[4] In the 1940s, Samuel Armstrong stated that the city of Clarksdale has business, schools and churches. He furthered stated it has "fifty-one food stores; twenty-two eating places; twenty general merchandise stores; twenty-four clothing stores; twenty-two eating places; twenty general merchandise stores; twenty-four clothing stores; eleven automobile dealers and garages…..Armstrong, "Changing Negro Life in the Delta," *Lost Delta Found*…, eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemrov. "Changing Negro Life in the Delta" was Armstrong's master's thesis in the Social Science Department at Fisk University. He was a field work on the research project.

recording machine that had the ability to capture every sound-effect for a significant duration of time. Lomax reflected: "In the past I had tried to capture the lambent sound of black congregational singing and had always failed."[5] He went on to assert that the "earlier portable equipment simply could not cope with a church full of black Baptists singing their hearts out, improvising harmonies and swinging round a perfect beat."[6] Now, with the right modern equipment, the robed choir, under a musical director, "struggled" to harmonize the sacred sounds according to the arranged tunes of the piano. This recording experience caused the Texas-native folklorist frustration. During one of their selections, a visibly agitated Lomax turned to Lewis and asked, "What is this?" Amused by the frustrations of Lomax, Lewis grinned and whispered, "It's the latest thing. They call it gospel." Most likely at Lomax's suggestion, they left the service for a "breath of fresh air."[7]

To be sure, Lomax felt that the choir had not quite mastered certain pitches and harmonies for the arranged musical selections. He uttered, "It was hard to tell which was more out of tune, the pianist or the choir. These ladies were clearly having trouble with this music, especially with the harmony imposed by the piano." The choir's sacred song-selections did not quite meet his expectations regarding what a "Southern black Baptist church" should perform. His assertion that he "could not believe he was in a Southern black Baptist church" underlined his expectation of hearing "the great hallelujah spirituals." He was dissatisfied with the pre-arrangements of the new gospel sound.

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[5] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: The New York Press, 1993), 45. Alan conflated two trips to Mississippi into one. He does not specify whether it was the 1941 or 1942 field trip.

[6] Ibid, 45

[7] Ibid.46.

Lomax felt that the new gospel music operated "within the frame of conventional European tradition."[8] His disappointment with the cultural shifts in Coahoma, Mississippi, was exhibited at a local juke joint.[9] Hearing the sounds of Duke Ellington's *In the Mood* coming out of the neon-green, electric jukebox, he watched a couple dancing like they were in "Harlem or South side Chicago." Noting that he could not watch the couple dance for long with any calm, he brought out his field notebook filled with a list of blues songs, paid a nickel, switched from Ellington to a "down home" Robert Johnson tune, and watched the couple transform into "Mississippians again," as they "slow-dragg[ed]" their bodies that "vibrate[d] against one another erotically." Lomax's perceptions were predicated on a preconception about what southern blacks ought to religiously perform. At times he labeled his presumption "old-time religion." "Old-time religion" was his reference to ecstatic rituals such as singing and "gettin happy" in the antebellum black southern evangelical tradition that was extended by black Protestants, such as Holiness, in the twentieth-century American South.[10] The folk spirituals or "hallelujahs" were a product of this "old-time religion" that stirred Lomax's soul with wonder and awe.[11]

The cultural shifts in Clarksdale appeared to disrupt what Lomax called the "traditional folklore" in black religious culture in the Deep South. One black Mississippian, Reverend Martin, who was selling gospel songbooks in front of First African Church, described to Lomax: "You see, in the modern Baptist church we are

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[8] Ibid, 46-47.
[9] Ibid, 38-9

[10] Ibid, 70-93. Similar to Zora Hurston, Alan came to the conclusion that the old-time evangelical religion among southern blacks was African derived. Both Hurston, and more so, Alan Lomax influenced Levine.
[11] His emotional attachment to the spirituals reflected his encounter with the "sacred."

trying to move on past the wonderful old cornbread spirituals and sermons."[12] Not too keen on musical notations and "standard harmonies" displayed in gospel songbooks, Lomax noted that the improvisational, "impersonal, heroic vein of *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho* vanished to the newly arranged and ego-centered pleading with the Lord for personal dispensations characteristic of the gospel music."[13] He argued that folk spirituals were more "heroic and noble" than the defeatist disposition of the gospel sounds. He would finally hear the "noble and heroic" folk spirituals performed by black sharecroppers in the small Arafat Baptist Church, near a plantation farm up route 61.[14]

Interestingly, the official "Folk Culture in Coahoma County" research project never came to fruition. Lomax stated that it simply failed.[15] The "failed project" was partly attributed to personal squabbles and to the occasional interruptions of World War II. Yet, real world theoretical tensions about the meaning and contours of religion also played a role, as Lomax and social scientists at Fisk University strongly disagreed about the folk dimensions in black religious expression. In his autobiography, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Lomax argued that while the Fisk's fieldworkers were highly skilled at situating the oral "lore" in their proper social context, they nevertheless failed to account for the highly creative cultural forces of the black Mississippian laboring class. His dream of establishing black folklore studies at Fisk University when he arrived there, quickly

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[12] Ibid, 46.

[13] Ibid, 47.

[14] According to Alan, some communities called spirituals "halleys," a shorthand for hallelujah. According to Fisk University musicology, John W. Work, noted, "The Delta people call them by a name not generally used---"Halleys." The name "spiritual" was unfamiliar to many of them." John W. Work III, Untitled Manuscript, *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University- Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*, eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 57.

[15] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where The Blues Began,* xii.

diminished due in part to what he felt was the typical black and American intelligentsia's prejudice against the religious vernacular traditions of the unlettered black population.[16] He extended his criticism of Fisk social scientists to Hortense Powdermaker and John Dollard, who studied the caste and class dynamic in Indianola, Mississippi, in the mid to late 1930s.[17] Like his folklore colleague Zora Neale Hurston (Chapter 3), with whom he traveled to Georgia and Florida in 1935, Lomax wanted to preserve the vibrancy and resiliency of the religious cultures of black workers over the "pathology school" posited by racial liberal reformers (Chapter 2). In his mind, the social scientists and racial liberal reformers ignored the dynamic and constant creativity of the black folk within harsh conditions. Listening to the folk spirituals performed by "old women" in the Arafat Church, Lomax wondered, "How could these worn farm laborers have created songs so full of nobility and love?"[18] In this sense, he democratized culture, not confining it to the educated and wealthy classes. Instead, he worked hard to show that the rural laboring class equally possessed culture as well. For Alan, religion clearly captured one important aspect of culture in the lives of the black lower working class.[19]

Yet, underneath his valorization of the black laboring class was an anti-modern romantic impulse that oftentimes engendered a one-dimensional portrait of the black

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[16] Lomax noted, "I believe that the result will be the establishment of active South-wide folk lore work at Fisk University, and this again will have long-term, deep rooted cultural and scientific results." Alan Lomax to the Division of Music at the Library of Congress, Sept. 18, 1941, *Alan Lomax: Assistant in Charge: The Library of Congress Letters, 1935-1946*, ed. Roland D. Cohen (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2011), 243.

[17] Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: Atheneum, 1969); John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 3rd Edition (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957). Both Powdermaker (as a fellow) and Dollard (professor) were affiliated with Yale University's Human Relations Institute.

[18] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where Blues Began*, 78.

[19] Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 34.

working class, and especially of their religious culture. While his passionate quest to preserve the "old-time" religious expressions served as a way to give "voice to the voiceless," it simultaneously served to reify and simplify what was in fact a very complicated picture of black southern laborers and their religious life. In this sense, his leftist politics that were informing his folk studies search for the old-time religion was ironically predicated on a certain form of containment. These blacks needed to be isolated and untouched by the modern world around them. In order to capture the folk religious songs that he was looking to preserve, he intentionally visited blacks who were illiterate, poor, and marginalized in rural South. He simply recycled the modern and pre-modern divide that his nuanced view of folklore combated. The underlying romantic impulse informing his earnest work to utilize folklore to shed light on the vernacular and lived experiences of black workers may have ironically also kept him from the complexities that would surface in the Coahoma study with Fisk University social scientists.

The field recording of Alan Lomax impacted the perceptions of the religious cultures of southern black workers. This chapter will focus on the political and cultural factors that shaped the person behind the recording machine and field notes. By focusing on the historical and cultural influences that shaped Alan, this chapter will identify how his understanding of folk or old-time religion ironically reduced the complexities of black southern workers. The nature of this chapter is threefold. First, I will discuss his first recording expedition with his father, John Sr., through the South during the Depression. This recording expedition actually exposed young Alan to folk religious sounds and consequently shaped his understanding of what constituted "old-time religion." Second, it is important to ground his folklore research and black southern religion in the populist

spirit of the "Roosevelt period." As part of the "popular front," Alan couched his folklore in his leftist politics and desire to redefine the national culture from the viewpoint of the laborers. He sought to reconstruct American nationalism through the everyday cultures and lived experiences of prison workers, sharecroppers, domestic servants, roustabouts, stevedores, and lumberjacks. Often overlooked by scholars of American religion was the way in which religion contributed to bolstering cultural democracy and ushering in the age of the "common man" in the New Deal and subsequent World War II era. Lastly, this chapter will revisit the Coahoma study and explore Alan's underlying romantic impulse coupled with the realities of his Washington-based institutional affiliation. I will briefly discuss the Fisk scientists who worked with Alan on the Coahoma research project, including musicologist John W. Work who presented an understanding of folk tradition within the changing dynamic of society. In comparison to Lomax, Work offered a view of folk religion and culture that sought to take into account the changing dynamics that influenced the everyday lives of black laborers in the Mississippi. Work presented a more complicated portrait of the religious worlds of black southern workers.

II. Recording the Souls of Black Prisoners

Alan's fascination with old-time religion was first formed while on a recording expedition in the summer of 1933. He never forgot about his first experience in the field with his father, John A. Lomax, which ultimately led to his conversion to the vocation of folklore and preservation of the religious expressions of black southern workers.[20] The transformative expedition occurred when Alan was an eighteen year-old undergraduate

[20] At times, Lomax described his field experiences in strikingly religious idioms, e.g. conversion. At his death, Bob Dylan mysteriously called him 'a missionary.'

student in philosophy at Harvard University.[21] The idea of a field expedition grew out of his effort to assist his struggling sixty-four year old father, John Sr., who was grieving the death of his wife and dealing with the brunt of the economic depression after the stock market crash.[22] Alan and his older brother encouraged their father to revisit his first love of ballad hunting and embark on a folk expedition and lecture circuit to help revive his poor financial and spiritual state.[23] "His first love" referred to his early days when two Harvard College English professors, Barett Wendall and George Kittredge, provided him with the resources to embark on fieldwork in the Southwestern frontier region in order to finish his collection of cowboy ballads.[24] This expedition led to the publication of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* in 1910.[25]

With an advance contract from McMillian Publishing Company and funding from the new Archive of Folksongs at the Library of Congress, John Sr. and Alan were able to gather barely enough resources to embark on a four-month southern trek from Texas to Virginia before heading to the nation's capital to transfer the aluminum and celluloid discs to the Library of Congress. Their recording expedition led to the publication of

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[21] Alan stressed that he was seventeen on his first recording expedition. This is incorrect. He was actually 18 by the time he hit the road with his father in the summer of 1933.

[22] For a wonderful biography on John Sr., see: Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life and Times of John A. Lomax, 1867-1948* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 275-308. John Sr. captured his state before the field expedition: "…while in 1932 I was barely recovering from an exhausting illness, with a home broken by the death of my wife, my four children scattered, and two of them, Bess Brown and Alan, nine and sixteen (sic) years old, respectively, still financially dependent on me." John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad-Hunter*, 106.

[23] According John Szwed, "With no money coming in, both sons continued to plead with their father to return to folk song collecting, lectures, and writing…" See: John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Viking, 2010), pp. Chapter 2.

[24] This expedition led to the publication of *Cowboy Ballads* in 1910.

[25] John Sr. dedicated the book to President Theodore Roosevelt. These ballads appealed to Roosevelt's hyper-masculine and bellicose nature.

American Ballads and Folksongs, and solidified a professional relationship, however contentious, with the Archive of Folk Songs at the Library of Congress. As the architect for the recording expedition, John Sr. desperately wanted to fulfill his lifelong love and focus more on the folk sounds of southern Negroes. He stated, "the main object of this journey was to record on aluminum and celluloid disks, for deposit in the Library of Congress, the folk-songs of the Negro."[26] Their collection of folksongs of the Negro was ultimately included in the American culture collection.

What was simply a trial run to test the three hundred and fifty pound Dictaphone machine was a transformative experience for young Alan. It was the experience of recording a "skinny little black woman" that proved formative to Alan's life-long quest to preserve the old-time religious vernacular cultures among black southern laborers. Approximately thirty miles outside of Dallas in Terrell, the unnamed black woman was taking a break from washing clothes, and decided to sing a baptismal song, "Wade in the Water."[27] John recounted that the woman's voice was high-pitched and possessed a "liquid softness that made the effect beautiful and moving." On the other hand, Alan's description of the black woman captured his amazement and awe: "[She] was full of shakes and quivers as the Southern rivers…She started slow and sweet, but as the needle scratched her song on the whirling wax cylinder, she sang faster and with more and more drive, clapping her hands and tapping out drum rhythm with heel and toe of her bare feet."[28] When she finished the song, Alan noted that she had tears and repeatedly

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[26] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, pp. 112.

[27] Or, 'Wade in de Water."

[28] I borrowed this quote from John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*, 36.

exclaimed, "Lord, Have Mercy."[29] This field experience, according to John Sr., led Alan to put his undergraduate education on hold temporarily and spend his entire life collecting ballads. Underneath his adolescent embarrassment was a curiosity with how her "voice soared so beautifully," and why she was crying and proclaiming, "Lord Have Mercy." This profound curiosity drove him over the next nearly fifty years to capture what he called the "old-time religion."[30]

Most interesting about the Lomaxes' fieldwork was the significance they attributed to the prison farms and state penitentiaries as critical resources for studying and archiving folklore and black religion in particular.[31] In addition to the remote "plantations" and "lumber camps," it was his father's fascination with the southern state and county penitentiaries that underlined their romantic reasons for collecting black religious expressions. John Sr. simply remarked, "the southern penitentiary was our best field." On the 1933 expedition, John reported that they visited eleven penitentiaries and communicated with nearly twenty-five thousand black inmates. Later Alan also echoed his father's sentiment that the southern prison camps were the "richest stores of Negro folk material ."[32] Alan revisited the prison camps in 1941 and 1942. To be sure, their journey to record in state and county prison farms was not novel in American history. Yet, according to anthropologist John Szwed, "no one before the Lomaxes had appreciated the richness of creativity within prison life, and none had sought [it] out with

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[29] Ibid.

[30] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 114.

[31] I use the "Lomaxes" to reference both Alan and John Sr.

[32] "Letter to Betty Calhoun," September 17, 1935, *Alan Lomax: Assistant In Charge: Library of Congress Letters, 1935-1945*, ed. Ronald Cohen (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2010), 13.

such dogged persistence."[33] Both father and son continued to revisit prison farms and state penitentiaries to record black oral expressions well into the '40s and '50s.

At the time of the Lomaxes' recording expedition, southern states and counties sought to capitalize on the penal system by leasing convicts out to segregated prison plantations and farms for free labor. John Sr. noted that the "penitentiary Negroes" played an instrumental role in the southern economy by "clearing the land, working its plantations, building its railroads, loading steamboats, raising levees, and cutting its roads."[34] Beginning in the late nineteenth century, state and country municipalities, and private businesses (for example the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Company) all had a vested interest in the "convict leasing system."[35] For blacks, the convict lease system and the petty laws revived the old slavery system of the antebellum period. A journalist for the Anti-Slavery Reporter noted that business bidders would pay southern states for convicts to "work on large cotton, corn and wheat farms, turpentine distillers, saw-mills, brick yards, phosphate mines, coal and iron mines, and railroads."[36] One example cited in the report is Louisiana's willingness to lease its ninety percent black convicts to levee contractors before 1928.[37] In 1903, Dr. W.P. Thirkied and other prison reformers noted that they detested the convict lease system because the underlying "motive of both State and Lease is not morals, but money; not reformation, but exploitation of criminals for gain."[38] In addition to the labor exploitation, prisoners were subjected to various forms of

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[33] John Szwed, 37.

[34] John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter,* 113.

[35] Douglass A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

[36] *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.-Feb., 1899), 43.

[37] *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* Aug. 3, 1901.

[38] *The New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1903.

cruel and unusual punishment at these plantations and farms. In the 1940s, black informants, Joe Savage and Walter Brown reflected over their time in Parchman and told Alan about the "state-approved instrument of discipline:" the broad leather strap or "the bat." The state sanctioned instrument drew "blisters from the bare flesh with each blow." Savage reflected, "They [prison guards] whupped us with big wide strops. They didn't whup no clothes. They whupped your naked butt. And they had two men to hold you down."[39] The irony of the prison farms was that they simultaneously represented sites of brutality and exploitation and "folk" cultural and artistic beauty.

For the Lomaxes, the transformation of these segregated prison farms into living and breathing archives of folklore was a response to what they perceived to be the shortcomings of modernization. While they were totally dependent on modern technology to preserve these folk art forms, John still perceived that the process of modernization created new motivations and sensibilities that increased contact between the white and black races, and consequently fundamentally altered the latter's pure cultural forms. He felt that modernization compelled blacks to mimic bourgeois white culture. Heavily influenced by his father, a young Alan wrote a proposal to the Carnegie Corporation of New York:

> prosperous members of the [black] community, bolstered by the church and the schools sneering at the naivete of the folk songs and unconsciously throwing the weight of their influence in the balance against anything not patterned after white bourgeois culture; the radio with its flood of jazz, created in tearooms for the benefit of city-dwelling whites—these things are killing the best and most genuine Negro folk songs.[40]

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[39] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where The Blues Began,* 257.

[40] John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*, 38. At the time, the Archive of Folk-Songs at the Library of Congress were funded by private philanthropic organizations, particularly Rockefeller and Carnegie Corporations. For more information on the Library of Congress, see Peter T. Bartis, *A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress: The Fifty Years* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1982).

In the realm of religion, his father reiterated that "Negro religious leaders [were] turning away from revival songs, spirituals, and informal church services to hymns and formal church modes."[41] In his later fieldwork in Eatonsville, Florida, in 1935, Alan recycled his father's anti-modern sentiment by complaining about a "huge, lazy and ignorant black preacher who tried to read a white sermon and copy the white man word for word."[42] This preacher did not want to perform the "rising and roaring" sermon that Alan expected.[43] The remote and segregated state and local prisons purportedly warded off the outside modern world, and thus allowed for the maintenance of a pure or uncontaminated folk religious culture. To an extent, John Sr.'s understanding of pure religious folk culture rested on the idealization of racial segregation: "They [black and white prisoners] are kept in entirely separate units; they even work separately in the fields. Thus a long-time Negro convict, guarded by Negro trusties, may spend many years with practically no chance of hearing a white man speak or sing." He further noted, "Such men slough off the white idiom they may have once employed in their speech and revert more and more to the idiom of the Negro common people."[44] With what John Sr. felt was the modern and educated "New Negroes' " disregard for the folk religious songs of the unlettered Negro, the prison farms and state penitentiaries contained the best folk religious materials that

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[41] John Szwed, *Adventures of a Ballad-Hunter*, 129

[42] "Alan Lomax to John Lomax," July 1,1935, *Alan Lomax: Assistant In Charge: The Library of Congress Letters, 1935-1945*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen, 4.

[43] Ibid.

[44] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad-Hunter*, 113.

appealed to the Lomaxes' sensibilities.[45] John Sr. said, "At each camp I heard spirituals hitherto unknown to me. The convicts came from every part of Mississippi, and the best songs of many communities survived among these singing black men."

What both John Sr. and Alan personally experienced while recording religious sounds and rituals in the rural small churches, labor fields, and domiciles only were equally duplicated in prison farms and state penitentiaries. What Alan later labeled as old-time religion was defined by prayers, sermons, spirituals, and hymns that were highly emotive, creative, polyrhythmic and improvisational in quality and technique. The polyrhythms defied standard arrangement and notation. And, most importantly for Alan, the old-time religious cultures had an affective quality that transformed the recording field sessions into an emotive experience that both father and son were not shy to include in their documentations. For instance, one of their first prison recordings was a "rousing or gravy sermon" at the Darrington Convict Farm, nearly thirty miles outside of Houston. Alan latter referred to "Sin-Killer Griffin's" performance as a "singing sermon."[46] It was the rousing sermon of Rev. Sin-Killer Griffin, a seventy-five years old, state employed

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[45] After a prison in Huntsville, Texas rejected John Sr. and Alan's attempt to record the inmates, they travelled to Prairie View State Normal College, where they hoped to record folk religious songs at a convention of seven hundred teachers from the rural districts. According to John Sr., "they [black teachers] were very polite, very pleasant, but our overture to them totally failed. It was partly because our approach wasn't exactly right, I think. We were just a couple of Southerners." Yet a music professor, Mills, secretly took them to black community in the Brazos Bottom where the Lomaxes recorded the religious songs (e.g. "Deep River) of a black family of fourteen. See: John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, pp. 115-116. John Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, pp. 39-40. Yet, the Lomaxes recorded a spiritual ("Woe Be Unto You) by Ruthie May Bevil, a summer student at Prairie View Normal School for Negroes. See*: American Ballads and Folk Songs*, collected by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1934), 604.

[46] Alan recounted the recording of Sin-Killer Griffen's singing sermon in his autobiography, *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Alan actually said that after hearing his sermon on the recording machine, Griffen responded, "People been tellin' me I was a good preacher for nigh into sixty years, but I never knew I was that good." John spelled the preacher's name, Griffin.

chaplain for blacks in the Texas Penitentiary System. When John Sr. notified Griffin that he had permission to record his sermon for present and future generations to hear at the Library of Congress, Griffin responded that he was going to preach his Calvary sermon. Stationed behind a pulpit between two huge corridors where the inmates were "caged," Griffin painted a creative portrait of the crucifixion: "Lightnin' played its limber gauze/When they nailed Jesus to the rugged Cross; / The mountain began to tremble/ When the holy body began to drop blood down upon it/Each little silver star leaped out of its little orbit." John Sr. was captivated by the "force of his voice, the intensity of his appeal," and the enthusiasm that transformed a penitentiary into a sacred space through the immediately elicited call-and-response from the audience: "So-nuff, Sure! Amen!, and Oh, yes!" After listening to his "Calvary sermon" on the recording machine, John Sr. noted that Griffin responded, "for a long time, I'se been hearing that I'se a good preacher. Now I knows it."

Yet, it was the singing of the black female and male inmates in the Mississippi prison system that evoked a particularly visceral reaction from John Sr. and especially Alan. After they discovered the self-proclaimed "king of de twelve-string guitar players ob de world," Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter in Louisiana's Angola Prison, both John and Alan arrived at the Mississippi State Prison on Sunday where they recorded the "best spirituals" for the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress.[47] Arranging the equipment in a large dining hall, the Lomaxes were stuck by the "powerful moving"

[47] Both John and Alan revisited Lead Belly in the Angola Prison on July 1, 1934. At the time, Lead Belly recorded song to appeal to Louisiana Governor O.K. Allen to release him from prison. John and Alan let the governor hear it and he released Lead Belly. John and Alan would schedule singing tours with Lead Belly in the mid 30s. At times, John had Lead Belly perform in prison attire. American writer Richard Wright criticized John Lomax as "one of the most amazing swindles in Amazing history." See: John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*, 59-92.

spirituals of the inmates. John Sr. noted, "These faces, some cruel, some crafty, some of them older, all, without expectation, had rapt expressions of intense devotion." John Sr. attributed the beautiful and powerful spirituals to the raw emotions unique to the southern Negro. These songs were devoid of self-consciousness or artificiality. Indeed, John noted that his son, Alan, stood "blinking back tears while his body swayed with the rhythm of the songs." His emotional attachment to the folk songs and cultures was constant during his field experience. In the preface of his autobiography, Alan noted that the field recording experience was a "magical moment opening up in time."[48]

Both John and Alan's emotional attachments were extended to the sewing rooms among black female inmates at the Parchman Farm. It was the soul-stirring songs, e.g. "Hearing My Mother Pray Again"," Motherless Child" and "So Soon, So Soon, I'll be at Home" that erased any trace of "evil" implied in their alleged acts of murder.[49] According to John, the women sang old-standard hymns in a peculiar long meter rhythm that was punctuated by low moans held to "breathless length." The exhausted axe- and hoe-toting male inmates also encapsulated the folk idiom in their singing of "Hell and Heaven:" I been 'buked an' I been scorned,/Childrens, I been 'buked an' I been scorned,/Childrens, I been 'buked an' I been scorned,/ I been talked 'bout sure as you're born.".[50] Not a stranger to heartfelt spirituals and hymns due to his occasional observations of the "zealous Methodists" in summer camp meetings in his Texas community, John Sr. said he had never heard the spirituals that were performed in the

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[48] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began,* ix.
[49] John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter,* 126

[50] John Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan Books, 1934) 588.

Mississippi State Prison and Parchman Farm.[51] After both visits, they concluded that the best spirituals come out of the Mississippi Delta.

The recording expedition in 1933 piqued Alan's fascination in what he later called old-time religion among black southern workers. To some extent, Alan's interest in the religious songs and experiences of black laborers was initially cultivated by his father's pastoral romanticism. Raised on a frontier farm in Bosque County, Texas, John's pursuit of these "informal" religious expressions was prompted by his romantic yearnings for an idyllic rural or agrarian paradise. Like many Americans whose lives were disrupted by the rapid industrial change in nineteenth-century America, his father privileged these agrarian settings (such as plantations, prison farms, lumber camps) over and against the artificial urban environment. His pastoral romanticism accounted for his association of the religious sounds of black southern workers with uncontaminated natural locations and substances. After listening intently to a "handsome mulatto" sing "Deep River," he noted, "To me and Alan, there were a depth, grace, and beauty in this spiritual; quiet power and dignity, and a note of weird, almost uncanny suggestion of turbid, slow-moving rivers in African jungles." John's listening habits were a part of a larger nineteenth-century American tradition in which the primitive, rural, and strenuous living functioned as a pathway to modern salvation.[52] In this sense, John Sr. was in agreement with the thoughts of his dear friend, Theodore Roosevelt.

To be sure, Alan was influenced by his father's pastoral romanticism and cultivated a disdain for the impact of modernization on the religious cultures of black laborers in the Deep South. What John Sr. and later Alan often overlooked was how their

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[51] John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter,* 1-23.

[52] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

field recordings of folk religious songs in these supposedly remote prison farms were "artificially" arranged in modern forms of power. They ignored the intricate power dynamics in their fieldwork e.g. their professional affiliation with the Library of Congress and consequently their relationship with state and local authorities. Most of the time, they would have with them a federal signed document from the Library of Congress that would grant them access to the prison farms and state penitentiaries. In some instances, the sharecroppers and prisoners were forced to perform and, at times, to sing specific folk genres of religion and blues. In the Parchman prison camp, inmates were forced to sing songs for the Lomaxes in the late night hours after a full day of labor in the fields that started at 4a.m. John described the Parchman prisoners: "The male convicts work from 4a.m. until dark. Thus our chance at them comes only during the noon hour and at night before the men are sent to their bunks for sleep, at nine o' clock. He remarked that the men were "timid, suspicious, and sometimes stubborn."[53] John stated, " In other instances, a guard forced an inmate to sing the devil music after the guard was told that inmate did not know any blues or "reels" to protect the inmate's relationship to his faith. For instance, the prison guards forced "Black Samson" to sing "sinful" tunes for John and Alan despite his insistence that he "got religion." Before he sung the sinful work tune, he "closed his eyes and prayed:" Oh Lord, I knows I'se doin wrong. I cain't help myself. I'se down here in the worl', and I'se gotter do what dis white man tells me. I hopes You unnerstan's the situation an' won't blame me for what I gotter do. Amen!"[54] On another note, these so-called remote environments that supposedly cultivate natural folk songs

[53] Ibid.

[54] John Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter,* 150. These sinful tunes were learned when "Black Samson was a railroad and levee worker.

also ignored why blacks decided to sing into the recording machine. The inmates and prisoners rarely benefited from their performed spirituals and other songs. Often black prisoners were under the impression that if they sung in the recording machine for the "big Washington men" that they would be released from prison. After beginning his twenty-one year sentence, Black Samson asked John Sr.: "Boss, cain't yo' help git outa dis place [prison farm]." Due to John and Alan's status with the Library of Congress, the field experience and consequently the folk religious songs were everything but remote and natural. The folk religious and blues songs were manipulated in conditions of power.

The listening habits and preservation activity of father and son also revealed stark differences. Alan's anti-modern sentiment in his folk research was deliberately wedded to his leftist politics developed in American society. Influenced by the labor strikes in Harlan, Kentucky, Gastonia, North Carolina, and Birmingham, Alabama, and the emerging popular front, at eighteen years old, Alan had already started to draw a connection between the power and beauty of the religious songs and experiences of black laborers and the "misery" caused by white supremacy.[55] Reflecting over his state of mind on his first recording expedition, he noted: "the powerful voices of the convicts blended and lifted their song like a black marble roof tree raised upon shining columns of onyx harmony. They were singing out of abject misery and utter despair, yet the sound was so majestic."[56] He imagined that the so-called [black] "murderers, rapists, and gunmen were individual gestures of protest against the harshness and deprivation of black life in

[55] In agreement with Michael Denning, I also situate Alan with the rising popular front. According to Denning, the popular front was defined as social democrats, anti-fascist and anti- imperialists, and campaigned against lynching and labor repression. See: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso Books, 1997).

[56] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where The Blues Began,* pp. 285-6.

Niggertown and in the quarters." Of course, he had to keep these opinions hidden from his father, who "had sympathy for the Negro prisoners and a genuine concern for black welfare, [but he] believed in the overall beneficence of the Southern system."[57] Yet his father definitely knew that his son, like most college students, appreciated Karl Marx's critique of industrial capitalism in *Das Kapital* and had developed an interest in labor unions and protest movements, especially the cold miners' strike in Harlan, Kentucky.[58]

During the recording expedition in 1933, a frustrated John noted that his poor son had dramatized the poverty of black farm-owners and wanted to set all the black inmates free. It was after his first expedition that Alan sought to extend his father's understanding of the "folk or the real people, the plain people, devoid of tinsel and glamor" to the concept of the proletariat.[59] This merger was made particularly plain when both father and son traveled to a small and dirt-floor church at the Smithers plantation and a sharecropper, "spoke into the recorded horn: "Now, Mr. President, you just don't know how bad they're treating us folks down here. I'm singing to you and I'm talking to you so I hope you will come down here and do something for us poor folks here in Texas."[60] Reference to the newly elected Franklin Roosevelt and subsequent New Deal programs captured the historical spirit in which Alan merged his passion for the old-time religion with left-leaning politics in order to reestablish the "official" American cultures through

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[57] Ibid.

[58] According to Swzed, while a student at Harvard, Alan was head of the student organization that raised money for the miners who were on strike in Harlan, Kentucky. For more information on Alan and Communism, see: John Swzed, *Alan Lomax,* 5-58.

[59] His father offered his definition of folk in his autobiography. John noted, "the real people, the plain people, devoid of time and glamour…, John Lomax, *Adventures of Ballad Hunter*, ix.

[60] Alan Lomax, "Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era," *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2003), 93.

the lives of what Franklin Delano Roosevelt noted was the "forgotten man." While John's love for the old-time spirituals underscored his attachment to the Old plantation South, Alan's attachment was indicative of the political climate, sparked by the Depression and World War II, that highlighted the cultures and lives of the everyday workers for the national culture. In essence, Alan was instrumental in spearheading a form of cultural democracy that was characteristic of a populist spirit in the "Roosevelt period."

III. Folk Spirituals and American Nationalism in the "Roosevelt Age"

The Roosevelt period influenced the leftist and populist political underpinnings of Alan's field documentation of the old-time religion in black life. The collected old-time spirituals and hymns in the prison farms and state penitentiary, plantations and lumber camps had everything to do with the political and cultural shifts caused by the Depression and World War II. A year before Alan's first field recording trek, Governor Franklin Roosevelt set a record at the polls by defeating President Herbert Hoover with 7, 054, 520 more votes in the presidential race. *The New York Times* reported that Roosevelt received the "highest popular and electoral votes ever given to a winning candidate."[61] Roosevelt extended his campaign platform on the "forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid" through his federal relief and welfare programs.[62] By 1935, the Roosevelt administration broke new ground by extending the federal relief and welfare program to the artistic and cultural realms. On one level, the extension of economic relief to the artistic and cultural programs were simply measures to ensure employment for starving artists, painters, writers, musicians, and actors. At a deeper level, it was also

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[61] *The New York Times*, "Roosevelt Victor By 7,054, 520 Votes," December 25, 1932.

[62] Franklin Roosevelt, "The Forgotten Man Speech," Radio Address, Albany, New York, April 17, 1932. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. 1: Genesis of the New Deal, 1928-1932 (New York: Random House, 1938), 625.

designed to validate an official American culture to confront the age of economic insecurity and subsequent global (fascist) war. Historian Benjamin Filene asserted, "Many people within the official culture began to treat folk forms as part of a resilient cultural core that, they hoped, would see the country through the depths of the depression and the perils of war."[63] The Roosevelt period represented a time in which the Depression inspired an array of federal and state bureaucracies, and social and labor organizations to focus on the rights of racial and working groups. In the social and political climate of breadlines, civil and labor strikes actually contributed to the collective yearning to trace American culture through its folk roots to usher in the age of the "common man." Historian Lauren Sklaroff argues that "the fusion of culture and politics took place as intellectuals not only administered state cultural programs but also cultivated a New Deal sensibility based on both a discovery of America's folk roots and celebration of a new national character."[64] The Roosevelts' personal aesthetic taste for sea shanteys and spirituals contributed to the wider American folk nationalism that led Alan symbolically to mark the time as the "Roosevelt period." Both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were personally invested in supporting the American folk renaissance, especially through cultural programs at the White House and Carnegie Hall.[65] In the summer of 1939, one of the ways the President and First Lady hosted King George IV and Queen Elizabeth at the White House was with an evening of American folk songs such as the Negro spirituals,

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[63] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 133-4.

[64] Lauren Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2009), 31.

[65] Alan discussed how he sung the cowboy ballads at the White House for the King and Queen (he was also temporarily studying anthropology and ethnomusicology at Columbia University) on June 9, 1939. He also helped to plan a World War II concert with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. See: Alan Lomax, "Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era," 93-98.

cowboy ballads, and Appalachian mountain songs. The *New York Times* reported, "A broad composite picture of the music Americans love and sing was presented in a widely diversified program for King George and Queen Elizabeth at the White House musicale tonight."[66] The reporters' concentration on the "voices of the miners, farmers, lumberjacks, workers of all kinds" illustrated that the discovery the folk roots of American culture was a [symbolic] celebration of diverse marginal groups that "had become the new basis for a new style of patriotism celebrating America."[67]

With the Roosevelt administration's expansion of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to the artistic, musical, theatrical, and literary fields (known as Federal One),[68] a cadre of federal and state bureaucracies (such as the Resettlement Administration, Federal Arts Project, Federal Writers Project, and Federal Theater's Project) was formed and all participated in the formation of an American national culture. One of the special projects dedicated to American folklore was the creation of the Folklore Studies Division of the Federal Writer's Project that helped to establish a Washington based folklore contingent that included Charles Seeger and Benjamin A. Botkin.[69] John Sr. headed the collection of slave narratives as the National Advisor of Folklore and Folkways for the Historical Records Survey Division of the Writers Project

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[66] "American Songs are Played and Sung for King and Queen: Sovereigns Hear Our Typical Music," *New York Times*, June 9, 1939, pp. 5.

[67] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 133.

[68] Nolan Poterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life and Times of John A. Lomax, 1867-1948* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 387

[69] For more on the federal, Washington base folklore research, see: John Alexander Williams, "Radicalism and Professionalism in Folklore Studies: A Comparative Perspective, *Journal of the Folklore Institute,* Vol. 11, No. 3 (March, 1975), pp. 211-234; Benjamin Feline, "Searching for Folk Music's Institutional Niche: Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger, B.A. Botkin, and Richard Dorson" in *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music*, 133-182.

Administration beginning in 1936.[70] Project One was part and parcel of the broad "documentary impulse" in the Roosevelt period in which technology (such as cameras, recording machines, and radios) was used to capture America through the local and lived experiences of ordinary people.[71]

Throughout the '30s and '40s, Alan was part of the Washington-based folklorists and contributed to the documentary impulse in promoting cultural democracy through his folklore research. He contributed to the populist spirit that colored the official American culture in his work with the Archive of Folk Songs of the Library of Congress and public radio programs. After his first recording expedition in 1933, he continued to enhance the archives of folk songs with ring-shouts, children game songs, chanteys, rushing songs, anthems, sermons and prayers from Sea Islands, Belles Glades, Nassau, Port-au-Prince before officially becoming the "Assistant in Charge" in 1937. While he was in charge of the collection of the Archive at the Library of Congress, he was the chief producer on the folk music series for the "American School of the Air" with the Columbia Broadcasting System in 1939 as well as the Rockefeller funded Experimental Radio Project in 1941. Alan earnestly worked to define the official America culture to include the diverse voices of local groups and communities who were socially marginalized by the racial and class structures in American society. He felt that Mississippi sharecroppers, Charleston longshoremen, Alabama domestics, and Kentucky coalminers all embodied the spirit of America. Taking advantage of the public radio, he strategically introduced the broader American listening public to the dustbowl ballads of Woody Guthrie, the mountain songs

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[70] Ibid, 386. It was reported that his pay was 3,200 a month. He was received $1 a month for his position as Honorary Curator at the Library of Congress.

[71] On the "documentary impulse" characteristic of the age, see: Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

of Aunt Molly, the Blues of Lead Belly, and the spirituals of the Golden Gospel Quartet. In 1941, he produced a radio program where he allowed farmer, Paul Ledford, to talk about the impact of the Tennessee Valley Authority on his way of life. He allowed Ledford and other farmers to voice their opinions to wider America through the public radio. Through the technological medium, the farmer could narrate his or her own story.[72]

To be sure, Alan's leftist political agenda relied on religious music to valorize "common workers." He felt that religion helped to capture a segment of American culture and life often hidden from the mainstream. Religion was incorporated into his broader scheme to establish American culture with reverence and appreciation for the vernacular sounds and lived experiences of black workers in particular. In the '30s and '40s, recording religious music was an important tool to highlight the vibrant and resilient cultures and everyday experiences of the working classes to the larger American public. Alan's preoccupation with the religions of the folk Negro accented the "ordinary" — meaning the locative and expressive rituals and emotive experiences over and against national religious organizations and doctrines.[73] In many of his recording expeditions in Coahoma County, Mississippi, he witnessed how religion was not confined to the church but deeply integrated into the everyday life of black sharecroppers. Many rural blacks reported having religious experiences within their own homes. For instance, one women described how she [got] happy in her "two-room windowless shanty," known as a "shotgun house:" "I was shouting awhile today. Wasn't nobody here but me. Whenever I

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[72] Alan started expanding his understanding of folk recording to life histories, where he would have the southern workers to narrate their everyday experiences and sing. Life-histories gave context to the musical performances.

[73] On the ordinary in religions of America, I rely on Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression.*

feel like praising God I just go to praying and read my Bible and I'm just as happy as I can be."

Alan's preoccupation with religion linked him to a cadre of "unchurched secular-humanists" who were not affiliated with any traditional faith- based community or set of conventional religious beliefs. Rather, they remained interested, and somewhat moved, by what the religious expressions and experiences communicated about the spirit of the working community within extremely difficult circumstances not of their own choosing. As religious historian Colleen McDannell argues, the Depression and World War created a bridge between the unchurched and churched. Although McDannell described the thirties and forties as profoundly secular in America life, she argues that unchurched, especially photographers in the FSA, appreciated the religious expressions of the "common people." Alan, like other federal workers, documented and consequently gave religious minorities an honored place in the national story.[74] As a result of Alan's fieldwork, the religious voices of southern black laborers were (and are) housed in the Library of Congress. His emotional attachment to the folk religious sounds demolished the traditional boundary between the secular and religion. Religious culture was modified to suit his leftist and patriotic mission.

For Alan, religious expressions of the "Holy Rollers" were not merely compensatory modes of escape. Through his field experiences, he saw that these religious expressions provided access into the ways a collective community confronted the exploitative environment. At the Arafat Church, which was on the King and Anderson Plantation, Alan recorded an old-time spiritual about Daniel in the Lion's Den. Before the

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[74] Ibid, 278.

spiritual, Brother Joiner remarked, "It takes Daniel for a reference. Daniel went through the same troubles that we are going through down here. Daniel was persecuted, put in the lion's den."[75] In this sense, Daniel became a symbolic medium for the sharecroppers to identify with the abject poverty on both King and Anderson's plantation. Although the sermon was entitled, "Payday in Heaven," Rev. Savage's guttural and roaring sermon, according to Alan, was a protest against two main problems ailing his congregants: the caste system and poverty, rooted in segregation and a dishonest economic system.[76] He couched the highly emotive quality in old-time religion among sharecroppers not as a compensatory mode of escapism but as a direct response to the conditions of race and class. In this sense, the folk category was not a vestige of a bygone past, but a living force with which to confront social and economic situations. Alan felt that folk-spirituals served as oral histories of a community's everyday lived experience.

IV. The Folk and Modern Dilemma in the Coahoma Study

Similar to other Washington-based federal folklorists, Alan ascribed to a functional view of folk culture, meaning that folklore was continually produced and used to deal with immediate everyday happenings in a specific local context. Alan's colleague, Benjamin Botkin, argued that "folklore was germinal rather vestigial, the germ plasma rather than fossils of culture," …[77] Alan interpreted the collective rituals of the trance and talking in tongues among Delta women as a way to instill their "inborn holiness" and create mutual bonds through shared experiences in the face of the "twin Delta torments of

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[75] Alan Lomax,*The Land Where the Blues Began,* 74-75.

[76] Ibid., 73.

[77] Benjamin Feline, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music,* 139.

poverty and lower-class status." He noted that for a "great majority of Delta women, battered or lonely, religion was a remedy, just as it had been for African women."[78]

Clarksdale County presented a problem for Alan and his quest to document folk religious expressions. While Lomax adhered to a more nuanced view of folk cultures, he still could not completely divorce himself from a fossilized understanding of folk culture and this surfaced in Clarksdale County or the "New World" in 1941 and 1942. It was the popularity of gospel music that worried Alan about the fate of folk cultures. His fears were triggered by his field observations of the gospel music culture in the state Baptist convention. He worried that the preference for a musical director and sheet music threated the polyrhythms, syncopations, and collective performances of the folk spirituals. After listening to the choir at the State Baptist Convention, Alan met Reverend Martin who was selling song sheets and books outside the convention. Martin responded to Alan's dismay by saying that churches were moving to a more modern and educated singing styles. Alan felt that the male music director and notated songbooks neglected the "old sister who could harmonize beautifully without direction."[79] Alan's issue with gospel music was that it suppressed the Negro folk idiom.

Alan was quite suspicious of the compositional nature of gospel music. He felt that the songbooks and sheet music of gospel music were mere imitations of the European conventional music. After examining the sheet music outside the State Baptist Convention, Alan asserted, "There was some of the great old songs, all right, but they were set like conventional nineteenth-century hymns…."[80] Similar to his father, Alan saw

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[78] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*,100.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid, 46-8.

arranged gospel songbooks as part of the artificiality of modernization that supposedly exposed black southerners to white bourgeoisie culture. In this sense, Alan never escaped his father's anti modern impulse that interpreted modern songbooks as a threat to the natural, spontaneous, and heroic folk sounds among the black workers in the Delta. His version of folk spirituals presupposed a quest for authentic experience that the more formalized music supposedly lacked. Demonstrated in Alan's visceral reactions in the southern field, his quest for folk spirituals and consequently old-time religion represented a "recoiling from the over civilized or artificial modern existence" and supplemented by a yearning for "intense forms of physical and spiritual experience…"[81]

In comparison to Fisk social scientists and musicologists, Alan's disappointment by the religious life in the commercial district of Clarksdale unveiled a static portrait of black laborers in the Delta. His romantic presupposition ignored the laborers and their complicated social contexts. He never explored the Delta blacks' close and intimate relationship between the plantation and city. Fisk University's Lewis Jones, musicologist John W. Work and sociologist student Samuel Armstrong joined Alan Lomax in the field study of Coahoma County. Although at times Fisk University social scientists ascribed to a problematic rural/urban divide in their mapping of religion and culture (Chapter 2), Jones, Work and Armstrong were attentive to broader changes that were affecting culture in the Delta. In his report, sociologist Jones discussed the complexity of culture relative to changes in transportation and generations. Due to their lifestyle of driving on the better highways, the last and third generation (between the ages of thirty and fifty) possessed a love for their Seeberg jukeboxes and radios. Samuel Armstrong also added another

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[81] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: AntiModernism and The Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), xv.

layers to the sharecropper's experience that Alan recorded and discussed in his autobiography. According to Armstrong, fifty out of the one hundred families of black sharecroppers they studied at the King and Anderson Plantation owned radios and read the urban newspapers. His field study most certainly did not understand the plantation as a remote or isolated setting inhabited by illiterate blacks. Other Mississippians, C.L. Franklin, Muddy Waters and B.B. King all discussed how they grew up listening to religious and blues "race records" on the phonograph.

It was the Fisk musicologist John W. Work who highlighted cultural shifts in the southern Baptist church and showed a more nuanced view of the purported "Negro folk" than Lomax. He felt that the common view that folk religion was antithetical to print and urban culture foreclosed valuable folklore material in many urban churches. Similar to Botkin, Work tried to transcend the rural/urban divide in the study of southern Negroes in the Black Belt. He also believed that the vestigial or fossilized view of folklore to which Alan fell prey overlooked the "present era of gospel song with its many effective soloists.[82] In his fieldwork, Work noted that the religious dynamic among black Mississippians was "exclusively Missionary Baptist, Primitive Baptist, and Methodist." Similar to Alan, he also visited the Holiness Church in Coahoma. His notation of the different denominations provided insight into the intricate details that impacted the form and content of the worship and music. While Alan was utterly disappointed that the southern Baptist did not replicate the old-time religious sounds, Work delved into the specifics and acknowledged, for instance, that Primitive Baptists preferred the long-meter hymns over the spirituals. Work also noted the shift to the piano and organ lent itself to

[82] John Work, Untitled manuscript, *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma Country Study, 1941-1942*, 56.

gospel and conventional hymnal sounds more than did Alan's folk spirituals. The Holiness churches made the spirituals the core of their services. The spirituals, according to Work, "intensified the rhythm of [the] dance bands in their most torrid mode." Yet, in the Holiness church, the spirituals were still intermixed with the tambourines, guitar, and a style of piano-playing which either imitates boogie-woogie at its hottest—or started it."[83]

V. Conclusion

Alan stated that the Fisk social scientists were gifted in providing the social and local context of the cultural expressions in the Delta. Yet he later chided the scientists for not recognizing the "creative wellsprings of [the] underprivileged majority and the dynamics of their constant creativity."[84] On some level, his critique of Fisk scientists resembled Hurston's challenge to black male intelligentsia. Yet, his critique of Fisk scientists said more about his yearning for old-time blacks and his anti-modern romantic impulse. His anti-modern impulse blinded him from the change and complex layers of black life in the Delta. Contemporary folklorist Patrick B. Mullen noted that Alan "creat[ed] an appealing but static and nostalgic portrait of black southern America." Mullen further stated, Alan perceived "change meant the passing of the old world and the death of the folk."[85] His romantic quest for the old-time black expressions was ironically founded on the social and political containment that he vigorously sought to protest. In other words, his definition of what constituted folk or old-time religious expressions were only possible if the black working-class remained segregated from the amenities of the

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[83] Ibid, 58.

[84] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, xiii.

[85] Patrick B. Mullen, *The Man Who Adores the Negro: Race and American Folklore* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 110.

wider modern world such as education, mail-order catalogues and technology. This is not to suggest that Alan welcomed the black working class' segregation from education and other social advantages of modern America. It remains, however, that Alan's old-time and folk religion was only possible if black southern laborers were illiterate and backwards, and isolated from the wider modern world. His romanticism blinded him from the irony at the heart of his mission.

Conclusion

"Imagining the Religion of the Folk Negro"

In September of 1939, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill professor of sociology and anthropology, Guy Johnson attended an elaborate Holy Communion Banquet on behalf of the Peace Mission movement in Harlem, New York.[1] At approximately eleven o' clock pm, Johnson entered a rectangular room adorned with a huge portrait of Father Divine and banners that bore mottos of his New Thought theology above long tables arranged in a "U" format. At the time of Johnson's arrival, the congregants were already engaged in their standard rituals of singing and testifying to the love and power of Father Divine.

Since Father Divine was largely absent for most of the religious ceremony, Johnson felt that it was an excellent occasion to observe the nearly four to five hundred congregants in the rectangular room. Seated in one of the cramped balconies, Johnson concentrated on the emotional energies of the congregants as they sang thirty to forty different songs. These songs ranged from popular love tunes, like the Sweetheart Waltz to shout songs, and old-time hymns, like "Draw Me Nearer," and were accompanied by the hard "swing-like" rhythms popular in music of the day. One female congregant assured Johnson and his guest that these songs were not printed but simply "outpourings of the spirit."[2] During the singing, Johnson documented the predominantly black middle-aged female congregants "hand-clapping, foot-patting, swaying bodies, and sometimes, a

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[1] Guy B. Johnson, "Notes on Behavior At Religious Service At The Father Divine Peace Mission," unpublished, *The Guy Benton Johnson Papers,* Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

[2] Ibid., 7

sort of shuffle dance."[3] Johnson was no stranger to black religious experience due to his folklore research in the South, yet he was completely astonished by the "rise and fall of the emotions and energies of the congregants in the banquet hall." This emotional display lasted for three hours. He asserted, "They would sing heartily, almost hysterically, for a while, then there would be a lull…then the tension would mount again and [there would be] a lull…another climax of singing, hand-clapping, etc."[4] Once Father Divine finally appeared on the main floor at approximately 1:15 am, Johnson documented how the emotional outburst reached its highest point. One black female congregant "gave a loud shriek, held her hands in the air, trembled all over, then made a whirling movement and collapsed in the arms of women standing around her."[5] Father Divine's glance triggered the woman's ecstatic behavior. This behavior happened on several occasions that morning.

More interesting than the observations was Johnson's interpretation of the religious behaviors of the congregants in the banquet hall. For Johnson, the religious behaviors were typical of the "Folk Negro." He understood that the Peace Movement created a psychic space for southern migrants, turned working class, to recreate their folk religious expressions in order to handle the de facto segregated "urban environment with all its loneliness, emptiness, and frustrations."[6] He viewed the Peace Mission as an extension of the familiar [southern] revivals, baptisms, and funeral services. Johnson noted that the "singing handclapping, and shouting were all in keeping with the sort of

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[3] Ibid., 3

[4] Ibid., 3-4

[5] Ibid., 9

[6] Ibid., 12

thing which was found in the religious behaviors of lower class Negroes… in the South." How are we to understand Johnson's use of the terms "folk" and "south" in his descriptions of the religious expressions of black working-class populations in the Peace Mission in Harlem, New York? What does the folk category demonstrate about the nature of religion in the historical context of race and class in twentieth-century America? What does the folk category highlight about religion in the political discourse surrounding the black lower- and working-class populations in America?

"Folk" was a widely used category in the study of black religion in the first half of the twentieth century. The religious expressions of the "Folk Negro" were a product of the social scientists and folklorists' study.[7] The religious expressions assigned to the black working class were shaped by the social scientists' and folklorists' professional affiliations and political ideologies. Focusing on the study of the social scientists and folklorists provides insight into the nature and function of religion in the context of race and class in modern America. A history of the folk category in the study of African American and American religion reveals that religion, more broadly, works to organize cultural and behavioral differences. The "folk" and "southern" categories contributed to defining the cultural and behavioral traits that distinguished the black lower- and working-class populations in American life.

After World War II, social scientists and federal bureaucrats defined the urban black underclass by a set of behavioral patterns outside the norms and values of the rest of American society, patterns that they viewed negatively or as leading to negative outcomes. Working on President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" program, Assistant

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[7] I am indebted to religious scholar's J.Z. Smith, *Imaging Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982). Smith argues that "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study."

Secretary of Labor Patrick Moynihan released a 1965 report that called on the federal government to administer programs to "enhance the stability and resources of the Negro American family" to reduce certain behavioral traits such as juvenile delinquency and low aspirations. According to Moynihan, the "tangle of pathology" of the urban black underclass was attributed, in part, to the dominant matriarchal family structure. [8]Liberal journalist Nicholas Lemann wrote that the "distinctive culture was the greatest barrier to progress by the black underclass, rather than employment or welfare."[9] More interestingly, Lemann described that the origins of the distinctive culture lay in the Deep South (such as the Mississippi Delta) that was transported to the urban cities. By the 1980s, the neo-conservatives would hijack the liberals' focus on the behavioral traits of the black underclass to undermine the welfare state. The study of the religion of the folk Negro contributed to the discourse on the black lower and working class in twentieth-century American life. My work on the social scientists and folklorists shows that "southern" and "popular" religion factored heavily in marking behavioral differences that distinguished the black underclass in America. In this sense, these social scientists and folklorists created and legitimated the ideas that shouting, chanted sermons, supernatural belief-systems, rhythmic prayers, swaying bodies, and hand-clapping were all behavioral traits associated with southern and working-class blacks (and whites too) in American life.

By attending to the social scientists and folklorists, we understand how personal and political ideologies color descriptions of religious expressions attributed to particular

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[8] Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action* (1965). http://www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965#chapter4

[9] Nicolas Lemann, "Origins of the Underclass," *Atlantic Monthly* (June, 1986).

racialized and classed bodies in America. Descriptions of religious expressions are never neutral or objective. Ethnographic descriptions of shouting, chanted sermons, supernatural belief-systems, and swaying bodies in black religious communities have a deep political and social history in American life. Odum, Johnson, Hurston, and Lomax presented different perspectives on the meaning of the folk category in black religion. Yet, a single thread that united them was how they each defined religious expressions of the folk Negro outside modernization. The aforementioned social scientists and folklorists recycled the premodern/modern and urban/rural binaries to locate folk and southern religious expressions and behaviors. Although Hurston presented the most nuanced view of the folk beyond the primitive connotations, she still felt that modernization such as education and the phonograph interfered with the African-influenced folk religious cultures. To locate the religious expressions of black southern religions actually precluded us from noticing how the black laboring class interacted with modern or mainstream American society. The folk category minimized the complexities of the religious expressions of the black southern and laboring class.

While social scientists and folklorists used the folk category to capture the ecstatic experiences and supernatural beliefs in the rural Baptist, Spiritualist, Pentecostal, Holiness, and Independent religious communities, they often ignored the communities' engagement with various modern business and commercial ventures, community development, and political organizing activities that were a constitutive part of so-called modern or mainstream life. The folk strain attributed to black southern and working-class religious behaviors overlooked how blacks developed their religious orientation in connection with wider mainstream or modern society. More research ought to investigate

the ways in which Pentecostal, Holiness, and Independent religious bodies interacted with mainstream America in order to show the complexities of the so-called southern and laboring-class in the twentieth century. In short, the folk category itself says more about the social scientists and folklorists than about the religious practices of African Americans under investigation.

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