The immediate predecessors of blues were the Afro-American/American Negro work songs, which had their musical origins in West Africa. The religious music of the Negro also originates from the same African music. However, while the general historical developments of Negro secular and religious music can be said to be roughly parallel, *i.e.*, they follow the same general trends in their development, and in later forms are the result of the same kind of accultural processes, a Negro religious music contingent on Christianity developed later than the secular forms. An Afro-American work song could come about more quickly in slavery than any other type of song because even if the individual who sang it was no longer working for himself, most of the physical impetuses that suggested that particular type of singing were still present. However, Africans were not Christians, so their religious music and the music with which they celebrated the various cultic or ritualistic rites had to undergo a distinct and complete transfer of reference.

For the African in the United States there was little opportunity for religious syncretism (the identification of one set of religious dogma or ritual with analogous dogma or ritual in a completely alien religion). In the essentially Catholic New World cultures, the multitudes of saints were easily substituted for the many *loa* or deities in the various West African religions. But in Protestant America this was not possible.

So the music which formed the *link* between pure African music and the music which developed after the African slave in the United States had had a chance to become exposed to some degree of Euro-American culture was that which contained the greatest number of Africanisms and yet was foreign to Africa. And this was the music of the second generation of slaves, their work songs. The African slave had sung African chants and litanies in those American fields. His sons and daughters, and their children, began to use America as a reference.

As late as the nineteenth century, pure African songs could be heard and pure African dances seen in the Southern United States. Congo Square, in New Orleans, would nightly rock to the "master drums" of new African arrivals. In places like Haiti or Guiana, these drums still do remind the West that the black man came from Africa, not Howard University. But in the United States pure African sources grew scarce in a relatively short time after the great slave importations of the eighteenth century.

The work song took on its own peculiar qualities in America for a number of reasons. First, although singing to accompany one's labor was quite common in West Africa, it is obvious that working one's own field in one's own land is quite different from forced labor in a foreign land. And while the physical insistence necessary to suggest a work song was still present, the references accompanying the work changed radically. Most West Africans were farmers and, I am certain, these agricultural farm songs could have been used in the fields of the New World in the same manner as the Old. But the lyrics of a song that said, "After the planting, if the gods bring rain,/My family, my ancestors, be rich as they are beautiful," could not apply in the dreadful circumstance of slavery. Secondly, references to the gods or religions of Africa were suppressed by the white masters as soon as they realized what these were—not only because they naturally thought of any African religious customs as "barbarous" but because the whites soon learned that too constant evocation of the African gods could mean that those particular Africans were planning on leaving that plantation as soon as they could! The use of African drums was soon prevented too, as the white man learned that drums could be used to incite revolt as well as to accompany dancers.

So the work song, as it began to take shape in America, first had to be stripped of any purely African ritual and some cultural reference found for it in the New World. But this

was difficult to do within the African-language songs themselves. The diverse labors of the African, which were the sources of this kind of song, had been funneled quite suddenly into one labor, the cultivation of the white man's fields. The fishing songs, the weaving songs, the hunting songs, all had lost their pertinence. But these changes were not immediate. They became the realized circumstances of a man's life after he had been exposed sufficiently to their source and catalyst—his enslavement.

And this is the basic difference between the first slaves and their offspring. The African slave continued to chant his native chants, sing his native songs, at work, even though the singing of them might be forbidden or completely out of context. But being forbidden, the songs were after a time changed into other forms that weren't forbidden in contexts that were contemporary. The African slave might have realized he was losing something, that his customs and the memory of his land were being each day drained from his life. Still there was a certain amount of forbearance. No one can simply decree that a man change the way he thinks. But the first black Americans had no native cultural references other than the slave culture. A work song about fishing when one has never fished seems meaningless, especially when one works each day in a cotton field. The context of the Africans' life had changed, but the American-born slaves never knew what the change had been.

It is impossible to find out exactly how long the slaves were in America before the African work song actually did begin to have extra-African references. First, of course, there were mere additions of the foreign words—French, Spanish or English, for the most part, after the British colonists gained power in the United States. Krehbiel lists a Creole song transcribed by Lafcadio Hearn, which contains both French (or patois) and African words (the italicized words are African):

Ouendé, ouendé, macaya!
Mo pas barrasse, *macaya!*
Ouendé, ouendé, macaya!
Mo bois bon divin, *macaya!*
Ouendé, ouendé, macaya!
Mo mange bon poulet, *macaya!*
Ouendé, ouendé, macaya!
Mo pas barrasse, *macaya!*
Ouendé, ouendé, macaya!
Macaya!

Hearn's translation was:

Go on! go on! eat enormously!
I ain't one bit ashamed—*eat outrageously!*
Go on! go on! eat prodigiously!
I drink good wine!—*eat ferociously!*
Go on! go on! eat unceasingly!
I eat good chicken—*gorging myself!*
Go on! go on! etc.

It is interesting to note, and perhaps more than coincidence, that the portions of the song emphasizing excess are in African, which most of the white men could not understand, and the portions of the song elaborating some kind of genteel, if fanciful, existence are in the tongue of the masters. But there was to come a time when there was no black man who understood the African either, and those allusions to excess, or whatever the black man wished to keep to himself, were either in the master's tongue or meaningless, albeit rhythmical, sounds to the slave also.

Aside from the actual transfer or survival of African words in the songs and speech of the early slaves, there was also some kind of syntactical as well as rhythmical transfer since Africans and their descendants tended to speak their new languages in the same manner as they spoke their West Afri-

can dialects. What is called now a "Southern accent" or "Negro speech" was once simply the accent of a foreigner trying to speak a new and unfamiliar language, although it was characteristic of the white masters to attribute the slave's "inability" to speak perfect English to the same kind of "childishness" that was used to explain the African's belief in the supernatural. The owners, when they bothered to listen, were impressed that even the songs of their native American slaves were "incomprehensible" or "unintelligible." However, as Herskovits says of early Afro-American speech:

". . . since grammar and idiom are the last aspects of a new language to be learned, the Negroes who reached the New World acquired as much of the vocabulary of their masters as they initially needed or was later taught to them, pronounced these words as best they were able, but organized them into aboriginal speech patterns. Thus arose the various forms of Negro-English, Negro-French, Negro-Spanish and Negro-Portugese spoken in the New World, their "peculiarities" due to the fact that they comprise European words cast into an African grammatical mold. But this emphatically does not imply that those dialects are without grammar, or that they represent an inability to master the foreign tongue, as is so often claimed." [2]

A few of the "unintelligible" songs are not as unintelligible as their would-be interpreters would have it. For instance, Mr. Krehbiel lists as unintelligible two "corn songs"—songs sung while working the corn fields. Only a fragment of one song remains, the words "Shock along, John." It seems to me incredible that Krehbiel could not see that *shock* is the word *shuck*, meaning to strip the corn of its outer covering, which is what the slaves did.

Five can't ketch me and ten can't hold me—
Ho, round the corn, Sally!

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

Here's your iggle-quarter and here's your count-aquils—
Ho, round the corn, Sally!
I can bank, 'ginny bank, 'ginny bank the weaver—
Ho, round the corn, Sally!

All of the above seems obvious to me except the third and fifth lines. But *iggle* is, of course, *eagle*, and an eagle quarter was American money. It would also seem that *count* in the phrase "your count-aquils" is either a reference to that money or the count of merchandise being harvested—in this instance, the corn. *Aquil* could be either an appropriation of the Spanish *aquí*, meaning *here*, or more likely an appropriation of the French word *kilo*, which is a term of measure.

Another less "obscure" song of probably an earlier period:

> Arter you lub, you lub you know, boss. You can't broke lub. Man can't broke lub. Lub stan'—he ain't gwine broke—Man heb to be very smart for broke lub. Lub is a ting stan' just like tar, arter he stick, he stick, he ain't gwine move. He can't move less dan you burn him. Hab to kill all two arter he lub fo' you broke lub.[3]

Though the above should be considered an American song, it still retains so much of the African that it might be difficult for some people to understand. Yet I think the references quite American. But now, however, by *African*, I do not mean actual surviving African words, but rather the African accent and the syntactical construction of certain West African dialects. It is relatively easy to see the connection in the syntax of this song and the literal translation into English of African phrases. For example, the literal English rendering of an Ashanti (Twi dialect) phrase meaning "to calm a person" is "cool he heart give him." (And here, I think, even the word *cool* should bear further consideration.)

[3] From Maud Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (Washington, D.C., Associated Publishers, 1936), p. 27.

African speech, African customs, and African music all changed by the American experience into a native American form. But what was a pure African music? Were there similarities between African and European music before the importation of the slaves? What strictly musical changes occurred to transform African music into American? How did this come about?

The role of African music in the formulation of Afro-American music was misunderstood for a great many years. And the most obvious misunderstanding was one that perhaps only a Westerner would make, that African music ". . . although based on the same principles of European music, suffers from the African's lack of European technical skill in the fashioning of his crude instruments. Thus the strangeness and out-of-tune quality of a great many of the played notes." Musicologists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even some from the twentieth, would speak of the "aberration" of the diatonic scale in African music. Or a man like Krehbiel could say: "There is a significance which I cannot fathom in the circumstance that the tones which seem *rebellious* [my italics] to the negro's sense of intervallic propriety are the fourth and seventh of the diatonic major series and the fourth, sixth and seventh of the minor." [4] Why did it not occur to him that perhaps the Africans were using not a diatonic scale, but an African scale, a scale that would seem ludicrous when analyzed by the normal methods of Western musicology? Even Ernest Borneman says: "It seems likely now that the common source of European and West African music was a simple non-hemitonic pentatone system. Although indigenous variants of the diatonic scale have been developed and preserved in Africa, modern West Africans who are not familiar with European music will tend to become uncertain when asked to sing in a tempered scale. This becomes particularly obvious when the third and seventh steps of a diatonic scale are approached. The singer almost invariably tries to skid around these steps with slides, slurs or vibrato effects so broad as to approach scalar value." [5]

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

These sliding and slurring effects in Afro-American music, the basic "aberrant" quality of a blues scale, are, of course, called "blueing" the notes. But why not of "scalar value?" It is my idea that this is a different scale.

Sidney Finkelstein, in *Jazz: A People's Music:* ". . . these deviations from the pitch familiar to concert music are not, of course, the result of an inability to sing or play in tune. They mean that the blues are a non-diatonic music. . . . Many books on jazz . . . generally describe the blues as a sequence of chords, such as the tonic, subdominant and dominant seventh. Such a definition, however, is like putting the cart before the horse. There are definite patterns of chords which have been evolved to support the blues, but these do not define the blues, and the blues can exist as a melody perfectly recognizable as the blues without them. Neither are the blues simply a use of the major scale with the 'third' and 'seventh' slightly blued or flattened. The fact is that both this explanation, and the chord explanation, are attempts to explain one musical system in terms of another; to describe a non-diatonic music in diatonic terms." [6]

The most apparent survivals of African music in Afro-American music are its rhythms: not only the seeming emphasis in the African music on rhythmic, rather than melodic or harmonic, qualities, but also the use of polyphonic, or contrapuntal, rhythmic effects. Because of this seeming neglect of harmony and melody, Westerners thought the music "primitive." It did not occur to them that Africans might have looked askance at a music as vapid rhythmically as the West's.

[5] "The Roots of Jazz," in Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy, eds., *Jazz* (New York, Rinehart, 1959), p. 13.
[6] *Jazz: A People's Music* (New York, Citadel, 1948), p. 68.

The reason for the remarkable development of the rhythmic qualities of African music can certainly be traced to the fact that Africans also used drums for communication; and not, as was once thought, merely by using the drums in a kind of primitive Morse code, but by the phonetic reproduction of the words themselves—the result being that Africans developed an extremely fine and extremely complex rhythmic sense, as well as becoming unusually responsive to timbral subtleties. Also, the elaborately developed harmonic system used in the playing of percussion instruments, *i.e.*, the use of drums or other percussion instruments of different timbres to produce harmonic contrasts, was not immediately recognizable to the Western ear; neither was the use of two and three separate rhythmic patterns to underscore the same melody a concept easily recognizable to Westerners used to less subtle musical devices.

Melodic diversity in African music came not only in the actual arrangements of notes (in terms of Western transcription) but in the singer's vocal interpretation. The "tense, slightly hoarse-sounding vocal techniques" of the work songs and the blues stem directly from West African musical tradition. (This kind of singing voice is also common to a much other non-Western music.) In African languages the meaning of a word can be changed simply by altering the *pitch* of the word, or changing its stress—basically, the way one can change the word *yeh* from simple response to stern challenge simply by moving the tongue slightly. Philologists call this "significant tone," the "combination of pitch and timbre" used to produce changes of meaning in words. This was basic to the speech and music of West Africans, and was definitely passed on to the Negroes of the New World.

Another important aspect of African music found very readily in the American Negro's music is the antiphonal singing technique. A leader sings a theme and a chorus answers him. These answers are usually comments on the leader's theme or comments on the answers themselves in im-

provised verses. The amount of improvisation depends on how long the chorus wishes to continue. And improvisation, another major facet of African music, is certainly one of the strongest survivals in American Negro music. The very character of the first work songs suggests that they were largely improvised. And, of course, the very structure of jazz is the melodic statement with an arbitrary number of improvised answers or comments on the initial theme.

Just as some of the African customs survived in America in their totality, although usually given just a thin veneer of Euro-American camouflage, so pure African songs, dances, and instruments showed up on this side of the water. However, I consider this less significant because it seems to me much more important, if we speak of music, that features such as basic rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic devices were transplanted almost intact rather than isolated songs, dances, or instruments.

The very nature of slavery in America dictated the way in which African culture could be adapted. Thus, a Dahomey river god ceremony had no chance of survival in this country at all unless it was incorporated into an analogous rite that was present in the new culture—which is what happened. The Christians of the New World called it baptism. Just as the African songs of recrimination survive as a highly competitive game called "the dozens." (As any young Harlemite can tell you, if someone says to you, "Your father's a woman," you must say, as a minimal comeback, "Your mother likes it," or a similar putdown.) And in music: where the use of the African drum was strictly forbidden, other percussive devices had to be found, like the empty oil drums that led to the development of the West Indian steel bands. Or the metal wash basin turned upside down and floated in another basin that sounds, when beaten, like an African hollow-log drum. The Negro's way in this part of the Western world was adaptation and reinterpretation. The banjo (an African word) is an African instrument, and the xylophone,

used now in all Western concert orchestras, was also brought over by the Africans. But the survival of the *system* of African music is much more significant than the existence of a few isolated and finally superfluous features. The notable fact is that the only so-called popular music in this country of any real value is of African derivation.

Another important aspect of African music was the use of folk tales in song lyrics, riddles, proverbs, etc., which, even when not accompanied by music, were the African's chief method of education, the way the wisdom of the elders was passed down to the young. The use of these folk stories and legends in the songs of the American Negro was quite common, although it was not as common as the proportion of "Americanized" or American material grew. There are however, definite survivals not only in the animal tales which have become part of this country's tradition (the Uncle Remus/Br'er Rabbit tales, for example) but in the lyrics of work songs and even later blues forms.

And just as the lyrics of the African songs were usually as important or *more* important than the music, the lyrics of the work songs and the later blues were equally important to the Negro's concept of music. In fact the "shouts" and "field hollers" were little more than highly rhythmical lyrics. Even the purely instrumental music of the American Negro contains constant reference to vocal music. Blues-playing is the closest imitation of the human voice of any music I've heard; the vocal effects that jazz musicians have delighted in from Bunk Johnson to Ornette Coleman are evidence of this. (And it seems right to conclude that the African and blues scales proceed from this concept of vocal music, which produces note values that are almost impossible to reproduce on the fixed Western tempered scale, but can nevertheless be played on Western instruments.)

If we think of African music as regards its intent, we must see that it differed from Western music in that it was a purely *functional* music. Borneman lists some basic types of

songs common to West African cultures: songs used by young men to influence young women (courtship, challenge, scorn); songs used by workers to make their tasks easier; songs used by older men to prepare the adolescent boys for manhood, and so on. "Serious" Western music, except for early religious music, has been strictly an "art" music. One would not think of any particular *use* for Haydn's symphonies, except perhaps the "cultivation of the soul." "Serious music" (a term that could only have extra-religious meaning in the West) has never been an integral part of the Westerner's life; no art has been since the Renaissance. Of course, before the Renaissance, art could find its way into the lives of almost all the people because all art issued from the Church, and the Church was at the very center of Western man's life. But the discarding of the religious attitude for the "enlightened" concepts of the Renaissance also created the schism between what was art and what was life. It was, and is, inconceivable in the African culture to make a separation between music, dancing, song, the artifact, and a man's life or his worship of his gods. *Expression* issued from life, and *was* beauty. But in the West, the "triumph of the economic mind over the imaginative," as Brooks Adams said, made possible this dreadful split between life and art. Hence, a music that is an "art" music as distinguished from something someone would whistle while tilling a field.

There are still relatively cultivated Westerners who believe that before Giotto no one *could* reproduce the human figure well, or that the Egyptians painted their figures in profile because they *could not* do it any other way. The idea of progress, as it has infected all other areas of Western thought, is thus carried over into the arts as well. And so a Western listener will criticize the tonal and timbral qualities of an African or American Negro singer whose singing has a completely alien *end* as the "standard of excellence." The "hoarse, shrill" quality of African singers or of their cultural progeny, the blues singers, is thus attributed to their

lack of proper vocal training, instead of to a conscious desire dictated by their own cultures to produce a prescribed and certainly calculated effect. A blues singer and, say, a Wagnerian tenor cannot be compared to one another in any way. They issue from cultures that have almost nothing in common, and the musics they make are equally alien. The Western concept of "beauty" cannot be reconciled to African or Afro-American music (except perhaps now in the twentieth century, Afro-American music has enough of a Euro-American tradition to make it seem possible to judge it by purely Western standards. This is not quite true.) For a Westerner to say that the Wagnerian tenor's voice is "better" than the African singer's or the blues singer's is analogous to a non-Westerner disparaging Beethoven's Ninth Symphony because it wasn't improvised.

The Western concept of the cultivation of the voice is foreign to African or Afro-American music. In the West, only the artifact can be beautiful, mere expression cannot be thought to be. It is only in the twentieth century that Western art has moved away from this concept and toward the non-Western modes of art-making, but the principle of the beautiful thing as opposed to the natural thing still makes itself felt. The tendency of white jazz musicians to play "softer" or with "cleaner, rounder tones" than their Negro counterparts is, I think, an insistence on the same Western artifact. Thus an alto saxophonist like Paul Desmond, who is white, produces a sound on his instrument that can almost be called legitimate, or classical, and the finest Negro alto saxophonist, Charlie Parker, produced a sound on the same instrument that was called by some "raucous and uncultivated." But Parker's sound was *meant* to be both those adjectives. Again, reference determines value. Parker also would literally imitate the human voice with his cries, swoops, squawks, and slurs, while Desmond always insists he is playing an instrument, that it is an artifact separate from himself. Parker did not admit that there was any separation between himself and the agent he had chosen as his means of self-expression.

By way of further illustration of this, another quote from Mr. Borneman:

"While the whole European tradition strives for regularity —of pitch, of time, of timbre and of vibrato—the African tradition strives precisely for the negation of these elements. In language, the African tradition aims at circumlocution rather than at exact definition. The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative; the veiling of all contents in ever-changing paraphrases is considered the criterion of intelligence and personality. In music, the same tendency towards obliquity and ellipsis is noticeable: no note is attacked straight; the voice or instrument always approaches it from above or below, plays around the implied pitch without ever remaining any length of time, and departs from it without ever having committed itself to a single meaning. The timbre is veiled and paraphrased by constantly changing vibrato, tremolo and overtone effects. The timing and accentuation, finally, are not *stated,* but *implied* or *suggested.* The denying or withholding of all signposts." [7]

[7] *Loc. cit.,* pp. 23-24.

6 / . . . . Primitive Blues and Primitive Jazz

A slave cannot be a man. A man does not, or is not supposed to, work all of his life without recourse to the other areas of human existence. The emotional limitations that slavery must enforce are monstrous: the weight of his bondage makes impossible for the slave a great many alternatives into which the shabbiest of free men can project himself. There is not even a separate identity the ego can claim. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" "A slave."

The work song is a limited social possibility. The shouts and hollers were strident laments, more than anything. They were also chronicles, but of such a mean kind of existence that they could not assume the universality any lasting musical form must have. The work songs and later blues forms differ very profoundly not only in their form but in their lyrics and *intent*.

Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh
Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh
Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh
Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, a dis mess.

(*repeated*)

Primitive blues-singing actually came into being because of the Civil War, in one sense. The emancipation of the slaves proposed for them a normal human existence, a humanity impossible under slavery. Of course, even after slavery the average Negro's life in America was, using the more ebullient standards of the average American white man, a shabby, barren existence. But still this was the black man's first experience of time when he could be alone. The leisure that could be extracted from even the most desolate sharecropper's shack in Mississippi was a novelty, and it served as an important catalyst for the next form blues took.

Many Negroes who were sharecroppers, or who managed to purchase one of the tiny farms that dotted the less fertile lands of the South, worked in their fields alone or with their families. The old shouts and hollers were still their accompaniment for the arduous work of clearing land, planting, or harvesting crops. But there was a solitude to this work that had never been present in the old slave times. The huge plantation fields had many slaves, and they sang together. On the smaller farms with fewer slaves where the older African forms died out quicker, the eight- and sixteen-bar "ballits," imitations of the songs of the white masters, were heard along with the shouts. Of course, there must have been lyrics to some of the songs that the slave could not wisely sing in front of his master. But the small farms and sharecroppers' plots produced not only what I think must have been a less self-conscious work song but a form of song or shout that did not necessarily have to be concerned with, or inspired by, *labor*. Each man had his own voice and his own way of shouting—his own life to sing about. The tenders of those thousands of small farms became almost identified by their individual shouts. "That's George Jones, down in Hartsville, shoutin' like that."

Along with this leisure there was also that personal freedom to conduct or ruin one's life as one saw fit. In the 1870's there were thousands of black migrant workers moving all

through the South. There were also men who just moved around from place to place, not really migratory laborers, just footloose wanderers. There could come now to these ex-slaves a much fuller idea of what exactly America was. A slave on a Georgia plantation, unless he was sold or escaped, usually was born, grew to manhood, and died right in Georgia. To him, the whole of America would be Georgia, and it would have to conform strictly to what he had experienced. St. Louis, Houston, Shreveport, New Orleans, simply did not exist (and certainly not New York). But now for many Negroes there was a life of movement from farm to farm, or town to town. The limited social and emotional alternatives of the work song could no longer contain the growing experience of this country that Negroes began to respond to. Also, the entrance of Negroes into the more complicated social situation of self-reliance proposed multitudes of social and cultural problems that they never had to deal with as slaves. The music of the Negro began to reflect these social and cultural complexities and change.

Very early blues did not have the "classic" twelve-bar, three-line, AAB structure. For a while, as I mentioned before, blues-type songs utilized the structure of the early English ballad, and sometimes these songs were eight, ten, or sixteen bars. The shout as much as the African call-and-response singing dictated the form blues took. Blues issued directly out of the shout and, of course, the spiritual. The three-line structure of blues was a feature of the shout. The first two lines of the song were repeated, it would seem, while the singer was waiting for the next line to come. Or, as was characteristic of the hollers and shouts, the single line could be repeated again and again, either because the singer especially liked it, or because he could not think of another line. The repeated phrase also carries into instrumental jazz as the *riff*.

Another reason for the changes in musical form was the change of speech patterns among a great many Negroes.

By now the language of America was mastered for casual use by most Negroes. While the work song or shout had only a few English words, or was composed of Africanized English words or some patois-like language that seemed more a separate language than an attempt at mastering English, early blues had already moved toward pure American lyrics (with the intent that the song be understood by other Americans). The endlessly repeated line of the shout or holler might also have been due to the relative paucity of American words the average field Negro possessed, the rhyme line being much more difficult to supply because of the actual limitation singing in American imposed. The lines came more easily as the language was mastered more completely. Blues was a kind of singing that utilized a language that was almost strictly American. It was not until the ex-slaves had mastered this language in whatever appropriation of it they made that blues began to be more evident than shouts and hollers.

The end of the almost exclusive hold of the Christian Church on the black man's leisure also resulted in a great many changes of emphasis in his music. The blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spiritual issued from, but with blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the "Jordan" of the song much more intensely a *human* accomplishment. The end of slavery could be regarded as a Jordan, and not a metaphysical one either, although the analogy of the deliverance of the Jews and the Emancipation must have been much too cogent a point for proselytizing to be lost on the local black minister. There was a definite change of *direction* in the primitive blues. The metaphysical Jordan of life after death was beginning to be replaced by the more pragmatic Jordan of the American master: the Jordan of what the ex-slave could see vaguely as self-determination. Not that that idea or emotion hadn't been with the very first Africans who had been brought here; the difference was that the American Negro wanted

some degree of self-determination where he was living. The desperation to return to Africa had begun to be replaced by another even more hopeless one. The Negro began to feel a desire to be more in this country, America, than chattel. "The sun's gonna shine in my back door someday!"

The leisure and movement allowed to Negroes after the Civil War helped to standardize the new blues form as well as spread the best verses that were made up. Although there were regional differences in the way blues began to be sung, there were also certain recurring, soon "classical," blues verses and techniques that turned up in a great many places simply because a man had been there from Georgia or Louisiana or South Carolina and shown the locals what his town or region produced.

But the thousands of black blues shouters and ballit singers who wandered throughout the South around the turn of the century moved from place to place not only because Negroes were allowed to travel after the Civil War, but because for a great many Negroes, emancipation meant a constant desperate search for employment (although there must also have been those people who, having been released from their bondage, set out at once to see what this country was really about). Not only the migratory workers who followed the crop harvests but the young men who wanted any kind of work had to tramp all over the South in search of it. It is also a strange note that once the Negroes were free, it was always the men who had the harder time finding work. Women could always find work as domestics wherever they were. But the black man who had done agricultural labor, as most Negroes had, found it difficult to find work because the impoverished whites of the South suddenly had to pay wages to their workers. The Negro had to have wages to live: for the first time he needed money and had to enter into the fierce struggle for economic security like any other poor man in this country. Again, even the economic status of the Negro after his freedom proposed new changes for

his music. "I never had to have no money befo'/And now they want it everywhere I go." The content of blues verse had become much changed from the strictly extemporized lyrics of the shouts and hollers.

It seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro music proper to whatever moment of the Negro's social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period. From the neo-African slave chants through the primitive and classical blues to the scat-singing of the beboppers: all would show definite insistences of reference that would isolate each group from the others as a social entity. No slave song need speak about the slave's lack of money; no early Afro-American slave song would make reference to the Christian Church; almost no classical blues song would, or could, make direct or *positive* mention of Africa. Each phase of the Negro's music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment. Hence the black man who began after slavery to eliminate as much of the Negro culture from his life as possible became by this very act a certain kind of *Negro*. And if this certain kind of Negro still endeavored to make music, albeit with the strict provision that this music not be a Negro music, he could still not escape the final "insult" of this music being evaluated socially, psychologically, and musically as a kind of *Negro* music. The movement of the Negro into a position where he would be able to escape even this separation from the white mainstream of America is a central theme of this book.

Even with the relative formalization of secular Negro music, blues was still an extremely personal music. There were the songs extolling the merits and adventures of heroes or heroic archetypes, John Henry, Stagger Lee, Dupree, etc., but even as the blues began to expand its references it still remained a kind of singing that told about the exploits of

the singer. Heroic archetypes or cowardly archetypes were used to point up some part of the singer's life.

In come a nigger named Billy Go-helf
Coon was so mean was skeered of hisself;
Loaded wid razors an' guns, so they say,
Cause he killed a coon most every day.

And this intensely personal nature of blues-singing is also the result of what can be called the Negro's "American experience." African songs dealt, as did the songs of a great many of the preliterate or classical civilizations, with the exploits of the social unit, usually the tribe. There were songs about the gods, their works and lives, about nature and the elements, about the nature of a man's life on the earth and what he could expect after he died, but the insistence of blues verse on the life of the individual and his individual trials and successes on the earth is a manifestation of the whole Western concept of man's life, and it is a development that could only be found in an American black man's music. From the American black leader's acceptance of Adam Smith "laissez faire" social inferences to some less fortunate black man's relegation to a lonely patch of useless earth in South Carolina, the weight of Western tradition, or to make it more specific and local, the weight of just what social circumstance and accident came together to produce the America that the Negro was part of, had to make itself part of his life as well. The whole concept of the *solo,* of a man singing or playing by himself, was relatively unknown in West African music.

But if the blues was a music that developed because of the Negro's adaptation to, and adoption of, America, it was also a music that developed because of the Negro's peculiar position in this country. Early blues, as it came to differ from the shout and the Afro-Christian religious music, was also perhaps the most impressive expression of the Negro's individuality within the superstructure of American society.

Even though its birth and growth seems connected finally to the general movement of the mass of black Americans into the central culture of the country, blues still went back for its impetus and emotional meaning to the individual, to his completely personal life and death. Because of this, blues could remain for a long time a very fresh and singular form of expression. Though certain techniques and verses came to be standardized among blues singers, the singing itself remained as arbitrary and personal as the shout. Each man sang a different blues: the Peatie Wheatstraw blues, the Blind Lemon blues, the Blind Willie Johnson blues, etc. The music remained that personal because it began with the performers themselves, and not with formalized notions of how it was to be performed. Early blues developed as a music to be sung for *pleasure,* a casual music, and that was its strength and its weakness.

I don't want you to be no slave,
I don't want you to work all day,
I don't want you to be true,
I just want to make love to you.

Since most Negroes before and after slavery were agricultural laborers, the corn songs and arwhoolies, the shouts and hollers, issued from one kind of work. Some of the work songs, for instance, use as their measure the grunt of a man pushing a heavy weight or the blow of a hammer against a stone to provide the metrical precision and rhythmical impetus behind the singer. ("Take this hammer, uh,/Take it to the captain, uh,/Take it to the captain, uh,/Tell him I'm gone.") Contemporary work songs, for example, songs recorded by Negro convicts working in the South—laying railroad ties, felling trees, breaking rocks, take their impetus from the work being done, and the form of the singing itself is dictated by the work. These workers for the most part do not sing blues. The labor is central to the song: not only is the recurring grunt or moan of these work songs some kind

of metrical and rhythmical insistence, it is the very catalyst for the song. On one recent record, the Louisiana Folklore Society's, *Prison Worksongs* recorded in Angola, Louisiana, at the Louisiana State Penitentiary there, one song listed as *Take This Hammer* begins as that song, but lasts as that for only about three "bars" (three strokes of the hammer) and then wanders irresolutely into *Alberta, Berta,* several blues verses, and a few lines from a spiritual. The point is that the primitive blues was at once a more formal music since the three-line, twelve-bar song became rapidly standardized, and was also a more liberated music since there was literally *more* to sing about. In one's leisure one can begin to formalize a method of singing as well as find new things to sing about. (It is an interesting thought that perhaps all the music that Negroes in America have made might have been quite different if the work that they were brought here to do had been different. Suppose Negroes had been brought to this country to make vases or play basketball. How might the blues have developed then from the impetus of work songs geared to those occupations?)

Work songs and shouts were, of course, almost always *a capella.* It would have been extremely difficult for a man to pick cotton or shuck corn and play an instrument at the same time. For this reason pre-blues secular singing did not have the discipline or strict formality that a kind of singing employing instruments must have. But it is obvious from the very earliest form of the blues that instrumental accompaniment was beginning to be taken into consideration. The twelve-bar blues—the more or less final form of blues—is constructed so that each verse is of three lines, each line about four bars long. The words of the song usually occupy about one-half of each line, leaving a space of two bars for either a sung answer or an instrumental response.

It may seem strange that the formal blues should evolve *after* slavery, after so many years of bondage and exposure

by the slaves to the larger Western cultural unit, into a form that is patently non-Western; the three-line verse form of the blues springs from no readily apparent Western source. But the use of instruments on a large scale was also something that happened after the Emancipation; the very possession of instruments, except those few made from African models, was rare in the early days of slavery. The stereotyped pictures that many of the apologists for the Southern way of life used as flyleaves for their numerous novels after the Civil War, depicting a happy-go-lucky black existentialist strumming merrily on his banjo while sitting on a bale of cotton, were, I'm sure, more romantic fiction than fact. The slave would hardly have had the time to sit on his master's bale of cotton during the work day, and the only instruments that were in common usage among the slaves were drums, rattles, tambourines, scrapers (the jawbone of a horse over which a piece of wood was scraped), and the like; even such an African instrument as the banjo was very scarce. The guitar was not commonly played by Negroes until much after the Civil War. An instrument like the harmonica grew in popularity among a great many Negroes simply because it took up almost no space and was so easy to carry around. But even the harmonica did not come into common use until after slavery, and certainly the possession and mastery of European instruments did not occur until much later.

When primitive or country blues did begin to be influenced by instruments, it was the guitar that had the most effect on the singers. And when the great masses of Negroes were just beginning to learn the instrument, the relatively simple chords of the country blues were probably what they learned. Conceivably, this also brought about another change: blues, a vocal music, was made to conform to an instrument's range. But, of course, the blues widened the range of the instrument, too. Blues guitar was not the same as classical or "legitimate" guitar: the strings had to make

vocal sounds, to imitate the human voice and its eerie cacophonies. Perhaps the reason why the guitar was at once so popular was not only because it was much like the African instrument, the banjo (or *banjor*), but because it was an instrument that still permitted the performer to *sing*.

When the Negro finally did take up the brass instruments for strictly instrumental blues or jazz, the players still persisted in singing in the "breaks." This could be done easily in the blues tradition with the call-and-response form of blues. Even much later in the jazz tradition, not only were instruments made to sound like the human voice but a great many of the predominantly instrumental songs were still partially sung. The first great soloist of jazz, Louis Armstrong, was a formidable blues singer, as was the great jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton. Both men sang blues almost as beautifully as they played their instruments.

The primitive blues was still very much a vocal music; the singers relied on the unpredictability and mobility of the human voice for their imaginative catalysts. But the growing use of European instruments such as brass and reeds almost precluded song, except as accompaniment or as an interlude. When Negroes began to master more and more "European" instruments and began to think musically in terms of their timbres, as opposed to, or in conjunction with, the voice, blues began to change, and the era of jazz was at hand.

"Jazz began in New Orleans and worked its way up the river to Chicago," is the announcement most investigators of mainstream popular culture are apt to make when dealing with the vague subject of jazz and its origins. And while that is certainly a rational explanation, charmingly simple, etc., it is more than likely untrue. Jazz, or purely instrumental blues, could no more have begun in one area of the country than could blues. The mass migrations of Negroes throughout the South and the general liberating effect of

the Emancipation make it extremely difficult to say just exactly where and when jazz, or purely instrumental blues (with European instruments), originated. It *is* easy to point out that jazz is a music that could not have existed without blues and its various antecedents. However, jazz should not be thought of as a *successor* to blues, but as a very original music that developed out of, and was concomitant with, blues and moved off into its own path of development. One interesting point is that although jazz developed out of a kind of blues, blues in its later popular connotation came to mean *a way of playing jazz*, and by the swing era the widespread popularity of the blues singer had already been replaced by the jazz player's. By then, blues was for a great many people no longer a separate music.

Even though New Orleans cannot be thought of with any historical veracity as "the birthplace of jazz," there has been so much investigation of the jazz and earlier music characteristic there in the first part of the twentieth century, that from New Orleans conclusions may be drawn concerning the social and cultural phenomena that led to the creation of jazz. Also, the various effects of the development of this music upon Negroes in the area can be considered and certain essential analogies made.

I have mentioned Congo Square in New Orleans as a place where African Negroes in the earlier years of slavery met to play what was certainly an African music. Marshall Stearns quotes an architect, Benjamin Latrobe, who visited Congo Square in 1819:

"The music consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man sat astride of a cylindrical drum about a foot in diameter, and beat it with incredible quickness with the edge of his hand and fingers. The other drum was an open staved thing held between the knees and beaten in the same manner. . . . The most curious instrument, however, was a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. On the top of the finger board was

the rude figure of a man in a sitting posture, and two pegs behind him to which the strings were fastened. The body was a calabash . . . One, which from the color of the wood seemed new, consisted of a block cut into something of the form of a cricket bat with a long and deep mortice down the center . . . being beaten lustily on the side by a short stick. In the same orchestra was a square drum, looking like a stool . . . also a calabash with a round hole in it, the hole studded with brass nails, which was beaten by a woman with two short sticks." [1]

This kind of gathering in Congo Square was usually the only chance Negroes had to sing and play at length. And, of course, even this was supervised by the local authorities: the slaves were brought to the square and brought back by their masters. Still, the Congo Square sessions were said to have included many African songs that were supposedly banned by the whites for being part of the vodun or voodoo rites. The slaves also danced French quadrilles and sang patois ditties in addition to the more African chants that they shouted above the "great drums."

Nowhere else in the United States is the French influence so apparent as in New Orleans; it was this predominantly French culture that set the tone for the Europeanization of African slaves in the area. The mulattoes, or light-skinned Negroes, in New Orleans, who were the result usually of some less than legal union between the French masters and black slave women, even adopted the name *Creole* to distinguish themselves from the other Negroes, although this term originally meant any white settler of French or Spanish blood. The Creoles, in much the same manner as the house Negroes on plantations in other areas, adopted as much of the French culture as they could and turned their backs on the "darker" culture of their half-brothers. It is safe to assume, for instance, that there were no black Creoles dancing in Congo Square.

[1] *The Story of Jazz* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 43.

The black man must have been impressed not only by the words and dances of the quadrilles and minuets he learned from the French settlers of New Orleans, but by the instruments the white Creoles employed to play them. So New Orleans Negroes became interested in the tubas, clarinets, trombones, and trumpets of the white marching bands, which were also popular in New Orleans as well as in many other Southern cities. (In the time of Napoleon, the popularity of the military band soon spread from France to all the settlements in the New World influenced by French culture.) The "exotic" rhythms of the quadrilles (2/4 and 6/8) and the military marching bands (4/4) also made a great impression on the slaves, and they tried to incorporate these meters into their own music. The black Creoles, however, tried to adopt these elements of French culture completely, learning the quadrilles by rote. Still slavery and the circumstance of the Negroes' bondage played a big role in this kind of assimilation as well. Many of the Creoles were freedmen by virtue of the accident of their birth, or at least were house servants long before the Emancipation. They had direct access to European music and instruments long before the rest of the Negroes in the area.

The marching bands that were started by Negroes in imitation of the Napoleonic military marching bands of the white Creoles also fell into two distinct categories. There were the comparatively finely trained bands of the Creoles and the untutored, raw bands of the Uptown, darker New Orleans Negroes (which did not begin until well after slavery was abolished). These bands were used for all kinds of affairs; in addition to the famous funeral processions, they played for picnics, dances, boating trips, and the like. One reason for the formation of these bands was the organization of a great number of clubs and secret societies and fraternities in the Negro communities (white and black) after the Emancipation. These societies and fraternities were an important part of the Negro's life, and drained a lot of

the black community away from the Christian Church, which had been the sole place the slaves could spend their leisure time. But it was not unusual for a Negro to belong to the Christian Church (in New Orleans, after the Black Codes of 1724, Negroes were only allowed to become Catholics) and to also belong to a number of secret societies. These societies still thrive today all over the country in most Negro communities, though for the most part their actual "secrecy" is the secrecy of any fraternal organization. The Masons and the Elks have claimed most urban and Northern Negroes, and the old vodun-tinged secret orders, sometimes banned by whites, have for the most part (except in the rural areas) disappeared completely.

One example of the way Negroes used European rhythms in conjunction with their own West African rhythms was the funeral processions. The march to the cemetery was played in slow, dirgelike 4/4 cadence. It was usually a spiritual that was played, but made into a kind of raw and bluesy Napoleonic military march. The band was followed by the mourners—relatives, members of the deceased's fraternal order or secret society, and well-wishers. (All night before the burial, or on as many nights as there were that intervened between the death and the burial, the mourners came into the house of the deceased to weep and wail and kiss the body. But these "wakes" or "mourning times" usually turned into house parties.) After the burial, the band, once removed some good distance from the cemetery, usually broke into the uptempo part of the march at some approximation of the 2/4 quadrille time. *Didn't He Ramble* and *When the Saints Go Marchin' In* were two of the most frequently played tunes—both transmuted religious songs. Even in this kind of march music the influence of the blues was very heavy, at least for the Uptown or "darker" brass bands—the Downtown Creole bands would have nothing to do with the "raw and raucous playing of those dark folks." The form of the Creole funerals must have differed also if the Downtown mourners were

emulating their white Creole models. Certainly a great many self-respecting Creoles must have frowned on the antics the darker Negroes performed when burying a member of their community. The long period of jovial mourning, complete with banquets and dancing, was certainly outside the pale of either Catholic or Protestant religious practice. Herskovits cites these burial customs as originating in West Africa, especially among the large Dahomey tribes. (An interesting note about the New Orleans funeral is that recently, in 1955, *Ebony*, the vehicle of American middle-class Negro aspirations, announced that when PaPa Celestin, the great New Orleans trumpet player, died, no jazz was played—"out of respect for PaPa.")

By the time the marching and brass bands were in vogue in New Orleans and some other parts of the South, Negroes had already begun to master a great many other European instruments besides the guitar and the harmonica. The trumpets, trombones, and tubas of the brass bands were played with a varying amount of skill, though when a man has learned enough about an instrument to play the music he wants to play, "skill" becomes an arbitrary consideration. The black brass bands of New Orleans around the turn of the century had certainly mastered the European brass instruments as well as the Downtown Creole bands, but by now they were simply "doing it the way they felt it." By the time the first non-marching, instrumental, blues-oriented groups started to appear in numbers, *i.e.*, the "jass" or "dirty" bands, the instrumentation was a pastiche of the brass bands and the lighter quadrille groups. In 1897, Buddy Bolden's group consisted of cornet, trombone, clarinet (the first reed instrument Negroes began to play with any frequency), violin, guitar, string bass (already an innovation over the tuba, the first "time-keeping" instrument in these bands), and drums.

The repressive "white supremacy" measures that were put into effect after the Civil War had a great deal of effect on the music of New Orleans. By 1894, there was a legislative act

enforcing segregation which hit the black Creoles hardest. It also, in the long run, helped redirect their social and musical energies. Up until the time of the infamous discriminative codes, the Creoles enjoyed an autonomy of social and economic status; to a certain extent they had the same economic and social advantages as the whites. Many of them had been educated in France and also sent their children to France to be educated, where many remained. Quite a few Creole families were among the richest families in New Orleans, and still others were well-known artisans and craftsmen. In a great many cases Creoles worked side by side with whites. They also enjoyed the cultural side of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New Orleans life: Creoles had their own boxes at the opera, and they participated in all the Downtown or white parades with their own highly trained military-style marching bands. But with the segregation acts of the late nineteenth century, Creoles began to lose the jobs where they had been working with whites, and they were no longer permitted to play Downtown, neither in the homes of the rich whites nor in the military parades.

It was about this time that the darker, blues-oriented musicians from Uptown New Orleans were beginning to play their "dirty" instrumental music in saloons and dance halls, at parties, picnics, and some of the places where the older brass marching bands used to hold forth. It was still a "marchy" kind of music, but the strict 4/4 march tempo had given way to the ragged 2/4 tempo, and the timbres and tones that people like Bolden began to use were radically removed from the pure sonorities of European-style marching bands. Theirs was a much more vocal kind of playing compared to the way brass horns had been used before. Again, this seems part of a definable cycle in the response of the Negro to the cultural and social stimuli of this country. The blues moved through much the same cycle, developing out of what seemed like imitations of European music into a form (and content) that was relatively autonomous. Primi-

tive blues is much more a Negro music than a great deal of the music it grew out of.

Miss Kemble in her diary reports hearing Negroes singing a song "while they labored" on river boats that was very much like *Coming Through the Rye*. It is quite probable that it was *Coming Through the Rye*. Most slaves in the early part of the nineteenth century could not have sung the words to the song, but could change them into: "Jenny shake her toe at me,/Jenny gone away;/Jenny shake her toe at me,/Jenny gone away./Hurrah! Miss Susy, oh!/Jenny gone away;/Hurrah! Miss Susy, oh!/Jenny gone away." Also relevant are the best of Miss Kemble's observations about Negro music—presumably their work songs, since she would hardly have observed them at any other time:

"Except the extemporaneous chants in our honor . . . I have never heard the Negroes . . . sing any words that could be said to have any sense. To one, an extremely pretty, plaintive, and original air, there was but one line, which was repeated with a sort of wailing chorus—

Oh! my massa told me, there's no grass in Georgia.

Upon inquiring the meaning of which, I was told it was supposed to be the lamentation of a slave from one of the more northerly states, Virginia or Carolina, where the labor of hoeing the weeds, or grass as they call it, is not nearly so severe as here, in the rice and cotton lands of Georgia. Another very pretty and pathetic tune began with words that seemed to promise something sentimental—

Fare you well, and good-by, oh, oh!
I'm goin' away to leave you, oh! oh!

but immediately went off into nonsense verses about gentlemen in the parlor drinking wine and cordial, and ladies in the drawing room drinking tea and coffee, etc. I have heard that many of the masters and overseers on these plantations prohibit melancholy tunes or words, and encourage nothing

but cheerful music and senseless words, deprecating the effect of sadder strains upon the slaves, whose peculiar musical sensibility might be expected to make them especially excitable by any songs of a plaintive character, and having any reference to their peculiar hardships." [2]

And so we have perhaps another reason why the Negro's secular music matured only after the end of slavery. The blues, as it came into its own strict form, was the most plaintive and melancholy music imaginable. And the content, the meaning, Miss Kemble searched for in vain in the work songs, was certainly quite evident in the later music.

Although the instrumental music moved toward an autonomous form only after the Emancipation, in only a few years after the beginning of the twentieth century, there was such a thing as a jazz band. And in a few more years this kind of band was throwing off most of its musical ties with the brass marching bands or the string groups of the white Creoles.

When the Creoles "of color" began to lose their Downtown jobs or found that they were no longer permitted to play for white affairs, some of them began to make the trip Uptown to sit in with their darker half-brothers. By this time, near the turn of the century, there was a marked difference in the playing and music of the Uptown and Downtown Negroes. The Creoles had received formal musical training, sometimes under the aegis of white French teachers. They had mastered the European instrumental techniques, and the music they played was European. The Uptown Negroes, who had usually learned their instruments by ear and never received formal and technical training, developed an instrumental technique and music of their own, a music that relied heavily on the non-European vocal tradition of blues. Many Creoles who had turned their backs on this "darker" tradition now began to try to learn it again.

An important idea to consider here is that jazz as it developed was predominantly a blues-based music. The blues

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.

timbre and spirit had come to jazz virtually unchanged, even though the early Negro musicians using European instruments had to learn to play them with the strict European march music as a model. The "classical" timbre of the trumpet, the timbre that Creoles imitated, was not the timbre that came into jazz. The purity of tone that the European trumpet player desired was put aside by the Negro trumpeter for the more humanly expressive sound of the voice. The brass sound came to the blues, but it was a brass sound hardly related to its European models. The rough, raw sound the black man forced out of these European instruments was a sound he had cultivated in this country for two hundred years. It was an American sound, something indigenous to a certain kind of cultural existence in this country.

Creoles like violinist Paul Domingues, when he said, "See, us Downtown people, we didn't think so much of this rough Uptown jazz until we couldn't make a living otherwise. . . . I don't know how they do it. But goddam, they'll do it. Can't tell you what's there on the paper, but just play the hell out of it," [3] were expressing perhaps the basic conflict to arise regarding the way the ex-slave was to make his way in America. Adaptation or assimilation? It was not much of a problem for most Negroes in the nineteenth century, although, to be sure, there must have been quite a few who had already disappeared (culturally) into the white world. The Creoles, for instance, had already made that move, but New Orleans was a special situation. Adaptation was the Negro's way earlier; he had little choice. He had not sufficient knowledge of, or experience in, the dominant culture to become completely assimilated within it. He went along the path of least resistance, which was to fashion something out of that culture for himself, girded by the strength of the still evident African culture. The Uptown musicians made jazz in this manner. The Creoles resisted "Negro" music because they thought

[3] Alan Lomax, *Mr. Jelly Roll* (New York, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950), pp. 15-16.

preclude their being Negroes. But they were unsuccessful in their attempt to "disappear" because the whites themselves reminded them that they were still, for all their assimilation, "coons." And this seems to me an extremely important idea since it is just this bitter insistence that has kept what can be called Negro culture a brilliant amalgam of diverse influences.

There was always a border beyond which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially. There was always a possible limitation to any dilution or excession of cultural or spiritual references. The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man's culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music.

What has been called "classic blues" was the result of more diverse sociological and musical influences than any other kind of American Negro music called blues. Musically, classic blues showed the Negro singer's appropriation of a great many elements of popular American music, notably the music associated with popular theater or vaudeville. The instrumental music that accompanied classic blues also reflected this development, as it did the Negro musician's maturing awareness of a more instrumental style, possibly as a foil to be used with his naturally vocal style. Classic blues appeared in America at about the same time as ragtime, the most instrumental or nonvocal music to issue from Negro inspiration. Ragtime is also a music that is closely associated with the popular theater of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although ragtime must be considered as a separate kind of music, borrowing more European elements than any other music commonly associated with Negroes, it contributed greatly to the development of Negro music from an almost purely vocal tradition to one that could begin to include the melodic and harmonic complexities of instrumental music.

Socially, classic blues and the instrumental styles that