Grey-Washing Jim Crow: The Cultural Colonization of African-American Folk Music
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1 In his classic treatise upon colonization, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon discusses the necessary violence of the decolonization process: an answer to the violence of the colonial presence. The colonial presence is internalized by the colonized to such an extent that even dreams of action are subversive:

   The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning.

2 Dreams need not be limited to unconscious hours. Fanon’s muscular dreams are the inner escape of the colonized subject wherever they may find a space to express their aggressive vitality away from the watchful eye of the colonizer. Fanon’s work refers to decolonizing Africa, specifically Algeria, but is applicable to different forms of colonization. Colonialism is not always a singular political act; it is layered and pervasive in its oppression. Fanon attempts to counteract the lingering psychological effects of colonial aggression against the colonized in a decolonizing world. From the failure of Reconstruction through the Jim Crow era, African-Americans experienced a form of colonialism in which they were denied an equal place in a nation quite literally built by themselves and their ancestors. In the post-Reconstruction era in the U.S. South, the African-American population was systematically legislated against through a series of laws designed to roll back any political progress and affirm the legal and social supremacy of whites. Social and even physical mobility was limited as institutional
segregation coupled with truancy and vagrancy laws kept the majority of African-Americans at the bottom of the economic hierarchy as a cultural Other.

3 African-American music is always already American while the source is a subject interpolated as the Other in U.S. society. It holds within its production the history of race and class in the United States. Class is stratified and structured by race, where whiteness is defined by the subjugation of blackness: through slavery, Jim Crow laws, and their ongoing institutional aftermath. African-American music is undeniably American but it is also a social commentary from the margins. In Lying Up a Nation, Ronald Radano frames a portion of his analysis through a reading of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, specifically the famous passage at the beginning of the text discussing Louis Armstrong’s poetic invisibility. Radano proposes that Ellison exposes the American identity “by revealing a conspicuously marginal and invisible black music as the nation’s voice” rather than centering and essentializing blackness. Radano asks “What do we hear when America sings? What sounds from the disembodied voice of a nation so traumatized and confused by its own racial constitution?” We hear the resonances of continuing colonization that denies its own aims, thereby effectively preventing an active decolonization. The nation’s voice is disembodied because the black body remains simultaneously fetishized and hidden in plain sight.

4 The answer to the problem of the white film painted over historic black music by white curation is active, consistent, and public contextualization. In Racial Formation in the United States, Omi and Winant contend that although “race is a template for the subordination and oppression of different social groups... it is also a template for resistance to many forms of marginalization and domination.” The project of white supremacy produced social, cultural, and physical violence, but it also showcased the strength, resilience, and cultural wealth of the racial Other. Rather than ignoring the white lens we must examine it and analyze the message within the music itself. Each instance of black song recorded by a white collector is a conversation between the cultural colonizer and the colonized. In theorizing the origins of the blues Amiri Baraka indicates “a border beyond which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially” but “it was this boundary, this no man’s land that provided the logic and beauty of his music.” It is this place of separation that became the goal of the cultural colonizer. There was unspoken violence there as the colonized had little choice but to hand over their cultural possessions or face negative social and perhaps even physical consequences, but there is also triumph as the songs themselves are resonant of not only acts of colonization, but acts of survival, achievement, and identity in the midst of historic and ongoing violent oppression.

5 The purpose of the present work is to explore regional Southern cultural colonialism in the period after Reconstruction and before Brown v The Board of Education officially, although not practically, ended segregation. Specifically, this article scrutinizes the rhetoric and practices of John Lomax along with Dorothy Scarborough as representative of white folk music collectors who pursued and published volumes of African-American music in this period. These early twentieth-century collectors very deliberately entered what they describe as a separate cultural sphere populated almost exclusively by black men and women in order to use their cultural resources, in this instance their folk forms, as their own social capital and nationalist projects. While this form of colonialism did not necessarily involve the direct geographic and political form of traditional colonialism it was no less a form of the same domination of one social
group over another with the purpose of economic and cultural exploitation. This article analyzes the ways in which they, along with later, ostensibly more progressive, collectors such as Alan Lomax (John’s son) and the Voyager Interstellar Record Committee enacted forms of cultural colonialism for the purposes of establishing the regional South as the foundation for a U.S. cultural ethos while simultaneously casting African-Americans as “representing not only the absence of values, but the total negation of values,” what Fanon identifies as the Manichaean Other.

Cultural resistance and white collection

While African-American folk music is a site of cultural colonization, it is also a site of resistance. Indeed, it is the inherent resistance within the music itself that makes it an attractive target for white appropriation. White folk collectors sought to preserve black music in the early twentieth century, but generally not for the purposes of uplifting the oppressed African-American community. They packaged the music as an innate expression of U.S. identity—a cultural artifact meant to signify an authentic and original American canon. As an expression of blackness, the music stands within a peculiar interracial conversation whose participants simultaneously deny that the conversation has ever taken place.

If the music as a space of resistance is itself an area of colonization, is it still resistance at all? Does it act in the intended way, as a voice for the marginalized? Or does it become another symbol of oppression? Folk music is historically a site of resistance to colonial oppression. This is especially true in the music that originates from the African-American community. Muscular dreams find an outlet through song. Cecil Brown confirms that “black folklore has a dream form;” it is highly symbolic in that it grew out of a need to hide in plain sight. Black folklore serves dual purposes: it acts as a form of escape and subversion of white colonial oppression while appearing harmless to white supremacist goals on the surface. It is Fanon’s dreams of aggressive vitality in action.

“Stagolee” is a well-known murder ballad derived from an actual murder that took place in St. Louis on Christmas night in 1895. “Stack” Lee Shelton, an African-American man, walked into the Bill Curtis Saloon and got into an argument with Billy Lyons, also an African-American man. Lyons snatched Shelton’s Stetson hat and refused to return it. Shelton calmly shot Lyons and walked out of the saloon. The incident caused a sensation in St. Louis; 300 people attended Shelton’s arraignment. This particular ballad illustrates the folk song as an act of resistance because it has a history that is verifiable from the initial incident. Stack Lee became a folk hero because he represented a very muscular form of black masculinity in the late 19th century—a time when conspicuous strength and prosperity could and did lead to dangerous resentment in the poor white community which could, and frequently did, easily end in public mutilation or lynching. Stack Lee’s hat was the symbol of his dignity; he had amassed enough money to dress himself well and project an image of prosperity. He placed his personal honor at a premium and did not hesitate to kill in order to maintain it. He stood in direct opposition to caricatures during and after that time depicting black men as either rapacious animals acting on instinct or the unquestioning and faithful slave. Despite this defiance of the set role, or perhaps because of it, the Stagolee ballad, and other similar bad man ballads held a fascination for white collectors.
In the early twentieth century songs such as these, sometimes referred to by the African-American community at the time as sinful songs, as opposed to the spirituals, were demonstrably an ongoing source of professional frustration for white folk music collectors. The reluctance of African-Americans to sing on demand for white collectors is well documented by those same collectors. At a historically black college, John Lomax was stymied in his search for "sinful songs" as "in some secret unknown way the signal for thumbs down on my project was flashed over the campus." The difficulty arose from the idea that such music was a sin to listen to or perform in the majority Baptist African-American communities of the South at that time. Dancing and singing frivolous songs was strictly prohibited, although once a person was saved and a member of the church, such activities were forgiven as long as they remained in the past.

Dorothy Scarborough writes extensively in the Introduction to On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs about the difficulties of convincing reluctant subjects to perform. Scarborough “haunted all sorts of places where Negroes gather for work or play”, i.e. her friends’ kitchens and plantations across the South. She used her carefully curated identity as a Southern lady to whitewash what amounted to cultural guerilla warfare as she lurked and entrapped African-American domestic workers who depended upon her goodwill—or at least that of her friends and patrons—for their livelihood. John Lomax found his solution to this reluctance and resistance to performing on demand when he, along with his then teenage son Alan, undertook a famous trip across the South sponsored by the Library of Congress in which they made the prison recordings: a series of recordings made of African-American men singing on the notorious prison farms throughout the South. Lomax argues for the truth of Henry Edward Krehbiel’s claim that “[t]he truest, the most intimate folk music, is that produced by suffering” and hoped to find the purest and most authentic forms of African-American folk song “entirely in the keeping of the black man.” Rather than lurk in genteel white surroundings like Scarborough, they searched for and found captive performers who were coerced into singing through a combination of violent intimidation and implied preferential treatment. The wardens ordered the prisoners to sing while many of them also held out hope that John Lomax would speak to the governor for them about commutation, something he actually did for one inmate in particular: James “Iron Head” Baker. He was able to use his voice and repertoire as a commodity to negotiate with Lomax to whom he was paroled after Lomax spoke to the Board of Pardons. He had agency and the music became a means of resistance to the very incarceration that engendered it. A similar, and much more famous story, claims that the bluesman Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter was also paroled through the efforts of Lomax, however Louisiana State Penitentiary files show that he was released for good behavior and joined the Lomaxes upon his release as a free man.

The Lomaxes are the most well-known example of white-curated surveys, but they are by no means singular—Carl Sandburg’s 1927 American Songbag includes African-American music, and of course Scarborough’s On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs was published in 1927, while Newman Ivey White’s American Negro Folk-Songs appeared in 1928. The collection of African-American folk song from this period involved an almost inevitable amount of paternalism, but simultaneously there is a Manichaean binary perpetuated by the collectors. African-American folk music was depicted as authentic and purely American while the performers were simultaneously exoticized, and cemented in the margins of society. Their very marginality was used to create an image
of unassailable authenticity. This was especially effective for John Lomax’s purposes in
the 1930s. He tapped into an American tendency toward outsider populism, a disposition resulting from a national crisis of self-esteem engendered by the Great Depression. Outsiders, outlaws, and other folk figures were perceived as figures that found a way out of economic dependence through self-reliance and disregard for the rules of organized society. While distinctly a form of escapism, the fascination with the Other also held a practical value—many families were displaced by the Depression and found themselves suddenly devalued by their own society. Outsider populism made the shame of this displacement less traumatizing for the individual and the nation as a whole.

The fascination and identification with the racial Other is perhaps most evident in the enduring quality of the blues. Bluesmen like Robert Johnson who died young in 1938 had “an ability to shape the loneliness and chaos of his betrayal, or ours. [...] one almost feels at home in that desolate America; one feels able to take some strength from it.” They survived without mainstream recognition and represented the “[r]esilient cultural core that would help the country through the depression.” In the social upheaval of the Great Depression, folk music provided a cultural center from the margins of the American experience during a time when much of the populace questioned the future of the nation amidst their own social and even physical displacement. Ironically, this difference precluded any real racial and class unification. Although it is impossible to hear their music without feeling immersed in Americana, the America that perhaps only exists within its own nostalgia, the perception of the music is still and always so racialized that even in its signification of America it is truly signifying the racial difference that underlies the nation.

The collectors themselves were not oblivious to the problems of race, in fact both Scarborough and Lomax considered their work as something done in part on behalf of the African-American race. Scarborough advises that “[p]oliticians and statesman and students of political economy who discuss the Negro problems in perplexed, authoritative fashion, would do well to study the folk-music of the colored race as expressing the feelings and desires, not revealed in direct message to the whites.” This explicit awareness made it appear more of a conscious move when African-American culture, as interpreted through white mediation, was used to fortify the Southern cultural superstructure through an appeal made to their white audiences. The narrative that surrounds the transmission of the folk songs is one that performs an Althusserian interpellation of both the audience of colonizers and the colonized sources as subjects of a U.S. Southern regional ideology replete with agrarian anxiety over modernism, as well as romantic mythologizing of the Old South.

Scarborough in particular used the folk music she gathered to create a narrative commensurate with the mythic Old South. She recounts horrifying stories of torture and lives lived in desperate bondage with an insouciance that is disturbing in its indifference. There is one song within which the context Scarborough provides is particularly illustrative of the ways in which she not only “fabricate[s] the colonized subject” as Fanon demonstrated, but also the colony itself: the plantation system. This is done in a Manichaean way by characterizing the African-American subjects as childlike and “not essentially logical.” She provides herself as the foil to this; the text as a whole is unmistakably centered around her journey. It is a travel narrative with Scarborough as the intrepid lady explorer immersing the reader in an exotic landscape.
“Run, Nigger, Run” is about a slave running from the horrific violence of white patrols that rode at night. Scarborough explains that “[t]he darkies sang many amusing songs about the patrols and their experiences in eluding them.” There are several versions of this song within the collection, each with their own adaptation of the flight from white brutality:

Run, nigger run; de patter-roller catch you;
Run, nigger, run, it’s almost day.
Dat nigger run,
Dat nigger flew,
Dat nigger tore his shirt in two.
Run, nigger, run; de patter-roller catch you;
Run, nigger, run, it’s almost day.
If you get there before I do,
‘Most done ling’rin here;
Look out for me, I am comin’, too,
‘Most done ling’rin’ here.

Chorus
I’m goin’ away, goin’ away,
I’m ‘most done ling’rin’ here;
I’m goin’ away to Galilee,
And I’m ‘most done ling’rin’ here.
I have hard trials on my way,
‘Most done ling’rin’ here;
But still King Jesus hears me pray,
‘Most done ling’rin’ here.

The version provided in its entirety is the only one she claims to have recorded directly from an African-American source. Scarborough overheard an old man of “quaint, antique dignity” singing at a train station in Kentucky. Other versions are taken from members of Scarborough’s family and her white acquaintances. “Run, Nigger, Run” is a controversial song. Because it is so well known and was recorded in blackface minstrel songbooks as early as 1851 by Charlie White in White Serenader’s Songbook, it is the best example of a song whose purpose was subverted by white collectors and their interpretation of blackness.

Scarborough focuses on the ways in which she can fulfill a stereotype of rascally slave hijinks that defends Southern regional exceptionalism. And indeed, it was regularly used as part of minstrel shows where it was portrayed as an amusing portrait of the black trickster. As with the trickster figure, however, there is another story at work, and it is one of survival and even triumph. There is no version extant in which the narrator of the song is caught. They were out all night away from white eyes, creating a piece of freedom. In another version, the narrator loses his wedding shoe which means he has gotten married perhaps without approval of the enslaver since he is on the run.

The song indicates another life after this one, and a caring addressee who can be prevailed upon to wait and thus share the fate of the narrator, whatever that might be, once they are done lingering, a word that indicates choice as well. It also adds an element of moral authority: “King Jesus hears me pray” signifies a special relationship with God in which prayers are listened to, and as any prayers uttered by the white opposition must hope for the opposite outcome it can be inferred that the narrator has the spiritual high ground. Yet another version adds the line “[w]hite man run, but nigger run faster” evincing an exultation in physical and mental superiority. If the
white man never catches up, then not only is he physically secondary, but he is also less intelligent and not as beloved by God, since it is the slave who is on his way to Galilee to join Jesus and it is his ability to avoid his pursuers that allows him to do so.

**Curating black authenticity**

18 As John Lomax would in 1933, Scarborough searched for authenticity in the South. They both portray themselves as explorers and adventurers for their white audiences, but also as experts since they are describing their own native region. The search for authenticity is of course highly problematic. It essentializes black Southern folk music as a quintessentially American art form while positioning white collectors and their audiences as the arbiters of that acceptability. In her introduction to *In Search of Authenticity* Regina Bendix discusses the political, social, and cultural implications of claiming authenticity: “identifying some cultural expressions or artifacts as authentic, genuine, trustworthy, or legitimate simultaneously implies that other manifestations are fake, spurious, and even illegitimate.”27 John Lomax insisted upon presenting Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter as the voice of collective blackness rather than as an individual singer/songwriter, although what Amiri Baraka describes as the “intensely personal nature of blues singing” and “the insistence of blues verse on the life of the individual”28 complicated Ledbetter’s effect. Authenticity meant that he must sing folk songs with no discernable origin rather than showcase his own personality and talent through original music; however, the nature of the music itself meant that his character and perceived persona would define his repertoire and the way it was received.

19 If, as Jennifer Lynn Stoever claims, the white listening ear drives the U.S. sonic color line,29 the U.S. musical canon is a white supremacist fantasy of blackness. Lomax was especially successful for a time in identifying himself as the national authority on musical authenticity through his work with the Library of Congress and the Works Progress Administration; his son Alan was even more adroit at positioning himself as such. They sought to position certain types of carefully curated black music as authentic thereby “aestheticizing black suffering.”30 Historically, African-American music has frequently been analyzed in a discourse of authenticity. Ronald Radano contends “authenticity is part and parcel of black music’s constitution within American racial ideologies.”31 Lomax and Scarborough’s search for racially authentic music and their forceful assertion of the white listening ear as the arbiter of the national sound extorted the performance of racial ideologies by their black sources.

20 The Lomaxes sought out African-Americans in the “practically ideal”32 locale of the notoriously brutal Southern prison farms in order to find men uninfluenced by popular music and regular association with white people. Scarborough depended heavily upon interviews with elderly white inhabitants of plantations who shared memories of archetypal ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’: the loyal, patient, submissive slave stereotypes that the myth of the Old South so heavily depended upon. Marybeth Hamilton points out “[t]hat the real thing turned out to be a white imitation invites us to consider the place of nostalgia, imagination, and fantasy in the shaping of the African-American folk canon.”33 Simultaneously, it allows us to consider how white nostalgia, imagination, and fantasy are foundational to the formation of Southern public memory, and the musical and literary canon is itself a product of Southern colonialism.
In their pursuit of authenticity, Lomax and Scarborough used the blackness they sought and interpreted to frame the whiteness of the South for the nation. Lomax went so far as to act as a mitigating force for the perception of penal brutality. Having visited some of the most notorious prison farms in the South, including Parchman, he indicates that although the blues songs are sad and represent immense suffering:

yet the sadness, the melancholy, did not, it is believed, grow out of brutal treatment. The men were well fed and their sleeping quarters looked comfortable.

In most places they worked hard, but the early ‘All quiet’ permitted sufficient hours of sleep. The visitors were given every freedom, and no case of cruelty was noted. The melancholy in the prison songs come doubtless from the Negro’s desire, as one said, ‘to git away f’om here. I jis’ don’ nachly like dis place.’

David Oshinsky writes a thorough history of the brutal prison farm system with a focus on Parchman in *Worse than Slavery*. He characterizes penal farms as “the closest thing to slavery that survived the Civil War. […] [their] story covers the bleak panorama of race and punishment in the darkest corner of the South.”

In the pursuit of his own professional goals, Lomax was not only complicit in the mythmaking surrounding the idea of a pastoral South, he was an active participant.

Numerous stories had come out of the South detailing the barbarous treatment of the men on the prison farms and Lomax could not have been unaware of this; however, since he owed his entrée to the prisons to political connections, it was an act of expediency to faintly praise the humanity of the treatment. He shared the song “Black Betty”, which he claimed was about the whip used to punish recalcitrant prisoners on Darrington Prison Farm in Texas:

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Oh, Lawd, Black Betty,
Bam-ba-lamb,
Oh, Lawd, Black Betty,
Bambalamb,
Black Betty had a baby,
Bambalamb,
Black Betty had a baby,
Bambalamb.
The first four lines repeat in each verse.
....It de cap’n’s baby,
Bam-ba-lamb,
It de cap’n’s baby,
Bam-ba-lamb.
....But she didn’ feed the baby,
Bambalamb,
But she didn’ feed the baby,
Bambalamb.
....Black Betty, where’d you come from?
Bambalamb,
Black Betty, where’d you come from?
Bambalamb.
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He similarly acted to lessen the shock and obvious comparison that could be drawn to slavery when he stated “by the way, whipping has been practically discontinued.” Prisoners were legally and frequently whipped in Texas until 1941.

The intentions and motivations of the collectors were layered. It would be simplistic to argue that they set out to oppress the black population of the U.S. South. Indeed, they appear to have genuinely believed they were doing the community a service and
behaving in highly progressive ways. In the atmosphere of the Jim Crow South, they were not altogether mistaken in thinking that they did some good. They did preserve music that otherwise might not exist today. John Lomax especially was responsible for priceless field recordings, which makes his legacy very mixed when balanced against his methods.

Alan Lomax was an even more complicated figure. He was a vocal proponent of civil rights and devoted much of his work toward furthering that cause. Although he sought to use his collections as a way to bridge the racial divide and foster a sense of understanding, as Aaron Oforlea explains, “Lomax’s white privilege impedes his ability to theorize blues performances as simultaneously taking place within and without white culture.”

Lomax was essentially too integrated into the white lens to acknowledge that he was part of it. Lomax's *Land Where the Blues Began* is perhaps his most famous and comprehensive work based around the music of the Mississippi Delta. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov's *Lost Delta Found* presents the uncredited study headed by John Work of Fisk University, along with Lewis Jones and Samuel Adams, that furnished much of Lomax’s material for the text. Work, Jones, and Adams's contributions are grossly underrepresented and Gordon and Nemerov also show that Lomax was working toward a "static and nostalgic portrait of black America". He ignored practices and people that did not agree with his presentation of the traditional, pastoral South, only including artists that he handpicked, reminiscent of his father's technique years earlier.

The attempts of white collectors to colonize and claim black music for a national project of whitewashing is not simply a story of paternalism and exploitation. It is simultaneously a narrative of resistance, and while that resistance is inherent within the music itself, it is also present in the counternarrative offered by black folk collectors, such as Zora Neale Hurston, operating in the same period. Her work collecting folk music and practices in Florida, Haiti, and elsewhere in the Global South illustrates Stoever's contention that "decolonizing does not begin after revolutions but rather that decolonized people lead revolutions." The songs that made up the recursive white collections may have served to perpetuate erroneous and incomplete ideas about U.S. society in the South, but they were ultimately thwarted by the very community they imposed upon because, as Stoever further claims, “[d]ecolonizing begins at colonization.” The songs themselves cannot be stripped of their meaning and intent—it is inherent.

Hurston's collection, *Of Mules and Men*, describes an all-black community that is not the stasis that Lomax projects from the prison farms. Hurston’s sources and settings are dynamic products of modernity, courting white anxiety without apology. She posed as a bootlegger to infiltrate a lumber camp as an equal rather than an interloper. Instead of acting as a travel writer, Hurston invited her audience to become a participant-observer with her. She showcased African-American culture as adaptable, vibrant, and progressive rather than primitive, and quaint.

**Conclusion**

There is still a white film over the blackness of early twentieth century African-American music. It distorts the people and their backgrounds, both white and black. It masks the triumphant resistance within the music and other cultural artifacts, and
demands that it serve the purpose of white supremacy. The Coen Brothers’ 2003 comedy *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is set in 1930s Mississippi and intentionally plays with Southern tropes and mythologies. Confusingly, the representation of black oppression is inexplicably white. The film follows three white men escaping from a chain gang whose subsequent misadventures are intertwined with the African-American experience, yet there is only one significant black role in the film—a young guitarist named Tommy Johnson who sold his soul at a crossroads, modeled on the historical bluesman Tommy Johnson who claimed to have exchanged his soul for skill on the guitar. He becomes the background guitarist as the three white men record a hit record while on the run—the man with supernatural talent relegated to mere accompaniment as the white voice is showcased. They eventually find themselves the targets of a Ku Klux Klan lynching party when they are mistaken for black after rubbing dirt on their faces to blend into the night. This is all done for comic effect, but it also paints a white layer over black experience, and claims that experience through disappearing African-Americans from their version of Mississippi.

The songs are a possession from the dispossessed past. They come from an invisible history that occurred on the margins and is only seen in its entirety when we look for the absences. In what is perhaps a disagreement with Radano, there is a way forward to decolonizing African-American music that centers blackness while avoiding essentialism. Although, this article is an opportunity to dissect the white mask, it was, and is, necessary as the first step toward setting it on the margin and seeing the muscular dreams of African-American music during the antebellum period through the Jim Crow era as a means of survival and triumph over slavery and cultural colonization. The songs themselves are living articles of resistance to white supremacy. In a response to Baraka’s assertion in *Blues People* that “a slave cannot be a man”, Ralph Ellison contends that a slave was “a man who realized himself in the world of sound”, that “the art—the blues, the spirituals, the jazz, the dance—was what we had in place of freedom.” It is the music itself that allowed the existence and retention of personhood.

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NOTES

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ABSTRACTS

This article explores the collection of black music by white folk collectors during the Jim Crow era in the U.S. South as an act of cultural colonization. The purpose is to analyze white curation of black authenticity as integral to early twentieth century attempts to demonstrate Southern and American exceptionalism—self-conscious and successful attempts by the collectors to shape American cultural memory of the South during the height of the Jim Crow era.

Cet article explore la collection de musiques noires des collectionneurs de musique folklorique blancs de l’époque de Jim Crow dans le Sud des États-Unis comme un acte de colonisation culturelle. Le but est d’analyser la conservation blanche de l’authenticité noire comme faisant partie intégrante des tentatives du début du XXe siècle pour démontrer l’exceptionnalisme du Sud et des États-Unis - des tentatives conscientes et réussies de la part des collectionneurs ayant pour objectif de façonner la mémoire culturelle américaine du Sud au plus fort de l’époque Jim Crow.

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