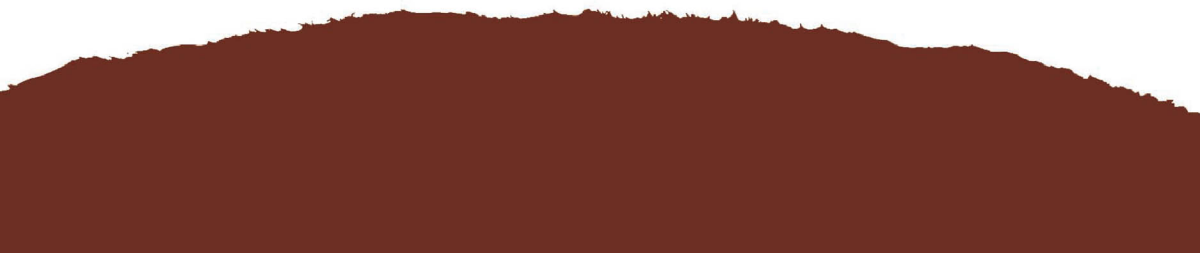
Caribbean Transformations

SIDNEY W. MINTZ



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Dedicated to the memory of my mother and father

Contents

Preface

The following chapters were originally written during a period stretching over two decades, most of them as independent essays, and deal exclusively with the Caribbean region. That region was the earliest focus of European colonial development in the New World. Sugarcane, African slaves, and the plantation system were introduced into it within twenty years of the "discovery." The Caribbean was to become a principal locale for the African slave trade, and one of the three major centers for the growth of Afro-American cultural syntheses in this Hemisphere.

I am indebted to Eugene Genovese and Jacqueline Wei Mintz, both of whom suggested to me separately that I attempt to put some of my essays into one easily accessible collection. This turned out to be a more difficult and time-consuming task than I had expected, both because I wanted to impart some unity of theme to studies that had originally been written for diverse purposes, and because no single essay seemed satisfactory on rereading. I also found that I had to make choices in deciding which to revise and include, and which to omit; I now recognize that no such undertaking ever leaves one very content.

Two good friends were kind enough to read through an entire early draft of the manuscript and to comment at length upon it: Jerome Handler and Alexander J. Morin were especially careful in their criticisms, though neither has any responsibility for the

results. Peter Wilson read and commented helpfully on the original preface, which was later incorporated into the introductory chapter which follows. A. T. Wall prepared the index. I am very grateful to these friends for their patience and help. The editors who worked on the manuscript at Aldine did much to improve the text, and were unfailingly kind and dependable.

Most of the work embodied in these pages was originally prepared while I enjoyed the support of such institutions as the Social Science Research Council, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale and the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sixième Section (Paris), and Yale University. Proper thanks should also go to those students, colleagues, secretaries—friends all—who over the years tried to make sense of my ideas, spoken and written, and to help me clarify them. The list would fill many pages, however, and I can only hope they will recognize that my gratitude to them is far greater than these perfunctory words must make it seem.

Lastly, I want to thank the people in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Haiti with whom I worked in the field. Anthropologists enjoy a special—and perilous—freedom. "We *impose* ourselves unasked," Fredrik Barth has written, "and in many ways incompletely perceived on other people in other countries and societies. There are no standards in those worlds for the intellectual and moral operation of making an anthropological study; and as 'marginal natives' we are free of many of the constraints of society—both ours and theirs. This entails that we must ourselves set the standards and impose the constraints, and that we carry full responsibility for what happens." (1974: 100). Unfortunately, there is a blitheness among anthropologists that sometimes goes by the name of "scientific objectivity," other times by the name of "dilettantism," and that becomes more dangerous, particularly to one's informants, with every passing day. While it is certainly presumptuous to suppose that we anthropologists know what is good for those whose friendship, trust, and help we depend on in the field, it is less presumptuous, perhaps, to try to recognize what is likely to be bad for them. In this book, as elsewhere, I have done my best to do these friends no harm; if, in any way at all, what I have learned can do them some small good, so much the better.

Acknowledgments

All the chapters in this book have previously appeared individually in various publications. Each, however, has been considerably revised and rewritten here. The following gives the original publication information.

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Chapter Three is a revised version of "The Role of Forced Labour in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico," published in *Caribbean Historical Review,* Volume 2 (1951), pages 134 to 141.

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Chapter Nine is a revised version of "The House and the Yard Among Three Caribbean Peasantries," published in *VI^e Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques,* Tome II (1^er Volume), 1960, pages 591 to 596, Paris.

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Afro-Caribbeana: An Introduction

In the course of the nearly five hundred years since the "discovery" of the New World, millions of migrants from every corner of the earth became "Americans." In the process they transformed aboriginal American life, such that even the most isolated and self-sufficient Native American communities of the Hemisphere were profoundly modified. "Becoming American," that is to say, has been a process of change defining the history of the Americas and affecting every inhabitant of the Hemisphere. Though the people of the United States persist in regarding themselves as *the* Americans, all who live in the Americas have a proper claim on that title, and those to our south commonly refer to us as *"Norteamericanos"* to make the point.

If we ask what, in some essential sense, makes one an American, the first answer is likely to be geography; however, only the Amerindians, of all Americans, can really lay prior claim to a world that was to become "new"—in total ethnocentric innocence—in 1492. But if this answer fails to satisfy, we may seek to specify further. We who are Americans live in societies and bear cultures whose origins are elsewhere, transformed by the migrations of our ancestors and by the novel challenges this New World imposed upon them. Today, the consequences of transplantation and of adjust-

ment during a period nearly five centuries long define us, even those of us who are Native Americans.

Such a definition may seem irrelevant when one considers the profound gaps—cultural, economic, linguistic, political, physical—that divide New World peoples, both within the component American polities and among them. But from the point of view of those of the Old World we are, in some fundamental way, of the New. That even slight additional qualification may appear to dissolve the contrast—we are rich and poor, Spanish-speaking and Quechua-speaking, Haitian and Canadian, black and white—does not really alter so central a historical feature of the New World reality.

From one vantage point, then, we of the Hemisphere are peoples whose ways of being share the common quality of a foreign past. From another, this reality seems unimportant in our daily lives and in our social relationships. We "Americans"—in this widest sense—share too little. That we are all in part from somewhere else fails of itself to provide us with any sense of common identity or destiny. In fact, some would even argue that the lack of understanding arising from an acknowledgment of the shallowness of our own roots typifies the American experience, dividing us rather than bringing us together. From the vantage point of an Egypt, a China, an India—or even a Europe—we of the Americas are raw and callow, the bearers of diluted civilizations. Our awareness of such disdain is often blurred, but the Limeño in Madrid, the Bostonian in London and the Martiniquan in Paris—not to mention the Trinidad-born Indian in New Delhi—share some knowledge of what it means to be an American, in this most ample of senses. That we more commonly experience our "American-ness" as something else—Blackness, Indian-ness, Third-World-ness, antiyanquismo, or North American xenophobia-at-large—is a reflection both of the highly differentiated character of the peoples of these continents, and of the relative rarity of social situations in which some generalized hemispheric identity might take precedence over other allegiances. In other words, what is implicitly shared by all Americans is usually ignored in the midst of more pressing priorities of consciousness.

And yet it should be within this widest context—the Hemisphere and its five short centuries of newness—that North Americans be-

gin to explore Afro-America. The very word is a hybrid, expressing symbolically the linkage of two worlds—but it is innocent, as is Euro-America, or Mestizo-America (Service 1955), and no more hybridized. We who think of ourselves as athwart the American tradition may claim to feel no need for hybrid words and hyphens, and to resent their implications—except, of course, on St. Patrick's Day, Columbus Day, and certain other Days, and in memories, dreams, and subtly persistent insecurities. Hyphens are supposedly laid aside, together with old languages, old costumes, and old habits of thought. Shiny new unhyphenated North Americans—gringos, the Mexicans might say—usually prefer the image of a past uncluttered by any realities, and marked by such cozy symbols as Washington's hatchet, Franklin's kite, Boone's bear, Crockett's coonskin cap, and Teddy's Rough Riders. We claim to honor a past; yet we have difficulty in admitting that it ever had a beginning, for particular persons among us.

This unease, this nervous joy, is part of a very North American style; Henry Ford's dictum that history is bunk is a North American dictum. We do not question the American past, most of us, in part because we covertly recognize that we are not altogether part of it. It is a seamless past, summed up in Jamestown, Sturbridge, and Freedomland; we make the Pilgrims' Pride our pride and our reality; it is Ellis Island and the village slums of Europe that become the fantasy. Nor should it surprise us that new and insistent demands that the Afro-American past be identified and explicated excite a certain amount of resistance. After all, if ancientness of pedigree were enough to win membership in the D.A.R., those worthy ladies might be aghast at the company they would have to keep. How much more anxiety-provoking, then, to the Johnny-come-latelies, is a pedigree search by the anciently disinherited!

Africa and Afro-America

But a genuine search for that hidden past has begun, and it requires of the interested that they think through seriously what "Afro-American" can mean. The term implies two backgrounds, or some kind of interpenetration of one background by another.

This book is largely concerned with just such implications as they apply to the Caribbean region[1]; their meanings are various and complex. Terms like "Afro-American" and "African"—or any comparably geographical term used adjectivally—are not self-explanatory. When one speaks of an "African" food, an "African" dance, or an "African" custom, for instance, one may mean any of several quite different things. An African food may be a crop domesticated in Africa or native to Africa—such as okra (*Hibiscus esculentus* L.) and akee (*Blighia sapida* Koen.). Or an African food may be a food processed in a distinctively African fashion, such that certain sorts of cassava cakes—the Haitian *bambouri* or

1. An agreed-upon terminology for ethnic and "racial" categories does not exist for the Caribbean region, and geographical terminology for the region itself is highly variable. Terms, the meanings of which appear self-evident when used in the United States, may not exist, or may lack acceptable equivalents, in the languages of many Caribbean societies, and vice-versa. Accordingly, the terminology employed in this book should be understood as arbitrary, and readers ought to feel free to substitute their own favorite words as necessary.

"Antilles" and "Caribbean" are used interchangeably. "West Indies" is generally employed to refer to the polities now or formerly within the British colonial system (e.g., Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, etc.), and that is how the term is used here. The terms "Española" and "Hispaniola" refer to that island where today's Haiti and Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic) coexist. Before 1697, it was a single Spanish (and hispanophone) colony. Thereafter the western third became (French) Saint Domingue and, in 1804, Haiti. That is how these names are used in this book.

Where appropriate, and according to ethnic separateness—as defined either by group "members" *or* by outsiders—terms such as "Chinese" or "Javanese" are used to describe particular Caribbean populations. The term "East Indian" is used in the anglophone Antilles to describe persons whose origins are in India, not in the East Indies; it is usually replaced in this book by the term "Indian." Those descended from the original inhabitants of the Caribbean region are also (though rarely) referred to as "Indians," and more commonly as "Amerindians," "Native Americans." or as indigenous or aboriginal peoples.

Persons of African ancestry may be so referred to; commonly, they are here called "Afro-Americans" and sometimes "black Americans." The term "Negro" is only rarely used, as is the term "colored" ("coloured"); like terms meant to describe genetic "intermixture" such as English *mulatto,* Spanish *pardo* and *moreno,* and French *gens de couleur* and *griffe,* these words occur principally in citations from the works of others. As far as possible, an attempt has been made to be clear in these usages; but that is not always easy.

the Jamaican "bammy"—might justifiably be considered African, even though the cassava is a New World cultigen and was only diffused to Africa after 1492. Conceivably, an African food could be a food eaten regularly by a group of Africans working at the United Nations—in which case one assumes that it would be a food they typically ate in Africa, and now continue to eat in a new setting, rather than that anything eaten by people from Africa thereby becomes African. One might be impelled to wonder, though, whether anyone feels that pigs' ears, turnip greens, and grits—items from the cuisine called "soul food" in the United States—could qualify as African, even if these foods are not (or were not) eaten in Africa. Most reflective persons would, one supposes, think not; but the confusion here is real, even if its implications are not wholly intellectual in character.

If we turn from such things as foods to human beings, the confusion is compounded. When a person is described as an African, one is prepared to assume that this means someone born in Africa, or a citizen of an African country or colony—that, at least, is parallel to the way we North Americans define an American. The term *African,* that is, refers to someone from a definable geographical area, the African continent. But if that is the meaning, are not the children of Kenyan Indians, Nigerian Lebanese, and Dutch voortrekkers Africans all? And, this of course, is part of the confusion —because, for at least some people, the term *African* carries clear overtones of physical type. Such confusion inevitably returns us to puzzles of culture such as cuisine, to ask again whether a food might be classified as "African" according to the physical type of those who eat it.

For most of those interested in defining the field of Afro-American studies, the term *Afro-Americana* has to do with culture—that is, with patterns of socially learned behaviors expressed in artifacts, languages, traditions, values, and the like. In the case of Afro-American cultures, the patterns of socially acquired behaviors and their consequences are principally—though by no means exclusively—carried in time and space by those descended at least in part from African slaves whose histories involved enslavement, forced transatlantic migration, protracted servitude, and persistent social isolation and exclusion. But the physical type of the indi-

viduals who maintain the behavioral patterns, hold the values, and use the languages is a relevant datum only to the extent that it affects behavior socially—that is, through the perceptions of the persons involved in social relationships. There is, in other words, no genetic relationship between a particular mode of learned behavior —eating turnip greens, dancing the frug, standing or gesturing or intoning in some patterned way—and the physical type of those who exhibit it.

Yet there is a noticeable readiness on the part of contemporary observers to attribute such behavioral patterns to heredity rather than to learning. In the case of white North Americans observing Afro-Americans—and it needs remembering that some Afro-Americans are phenotypically white, while some white North Americans are not—such attributions cannot be explained purely on grounds of a lack of observational keenness. While we may expect to see English children dance morrises, we are neither startled nor amused to see them dance a waltz or even a mambo. Polish children do dance polkas; but the news that they knew how to dance the watusi and preferred it probably would be received calmly by most of us. And yet, when we see black North American children dancing, too many of us expect them to dance in ways that are *somehow* connected to the way they *look*—even though we are not always prepared to admit this.

The implications of an assumption that socially learned behavior is really genetically transmitted are immensely important, and not only because of the intellectual errors that flow from this assumption. Here, however, the assumption concerns us only with reference to the study of Afro-Americana. In recent years in the United States, this assumed or imputed connection between physique and behavior has become more rather than less widespread among Afro-Americans; its presence among North American whites is ancient. Malcolm X tells us in his autobiography (1966: 57) that learning to dance appropriately was difficult for him at first; but soon his African ancestry—his "long-suppressed African instincts," as he put it—"broke through." There may be a full circle here: from the imputation of "inborn rhythm" to Afro-Americans by whites who cannot (or will not) distinguish between physique and culture, to the pseudoscientific question of the difficulties of finding

"a gene for rhythm," to the assertion of "an African instinct" for dancing by a black militant. To some extent, this conceptual merging of physique and behavior is expressed in common parlance by the use of such terms as *black* and *soul* without any clear attempt to specify that African or Afro-American cultures are socially learned and socially perpetuated phenomena. Discussions of Afro-Americana and Afro-American studies today thus must take into account the fact that terms like *Afro-American* may be used in ordinary discourse with either physical or cultural associations, or both, in mind.

The distinction between physique and culture was once drawn carefully by Afro-Americanists, as in the work of Melville Herskovits (1930: 145–55). The apparent linkage between physique and culture is difficult to dispute, however, in regard to such items as intonation, facial expression, gesture, and posture—items of the sort Herskovits himself once labeled (1945: 22) "cultural imponderables." It is easy to see why these aspects of behavior might be thought to be innate or genetically transmitted, since their manifestation seems "automatic" or "natural"; but the socially acquired character of these traits is demonstrable. The learned and patterned motor habits that we usually pick up unconsciously and at very early ages from our parents and other kinsmen, and carry into adolescence and adulthood, are both difficult to become aware of and difficult to change; the covert and unnoticed character of the social transmission of such habits is of course the principal reason why they are commonly perceived as "innate" rather than learned. Motor habits of speech are similarly learned, in good part unconsciously, and carried unnoticed; these, too, though to a lesser extent, may be perceived as "part of" a person because they seem to be linked phenomenologically to the very way in which he or she is defined.

It is of interest that these seemingly minor behavioral patterns are also closely tied to the expressive media, such as music, dance, drama, voice, and the like, and that it is in these aesthetic spheres, once again, that linkages between physique and culture are often imputed to Afro-Americans. However, rather than "explain" such behavioral patterns by vague reference to racial or instinctual responses, we should view them as continuities with the African past,

and as evidence of the success of Afro-Americans in conserving cultural materials that could not always be conserved in other aspects of life. Patterns of socially learned motor behavior are probably not readily destroyed, even by extremely repressive conditions; and the aesthetic and creative possibilities implicit in these traditional patterns and their cognitive accompaniments may have been among the cultural traditions most readily maintained under slavery.

Nonetheless, there is a strong predisposition to view the connections between physical type, learned motor behavior, and aesthetic expression as genetic rather than cultural, and it is not difficult to see why. What is more, the perceptions of persons who assume a genetic connection between perceived physical characteristics and learned behavior become cultural data themselves, by virtue of the effects such perceptions may have upon behavior. That is, physical type and culture are not biologically linked, but certain kinds of social behavior, based on the assumption that they are, can produce clear correlations between them. This assertion in no way qualifies a historical reality—that those African peoples torn from their ancestral homelands whose descendants are today's Afro-Americans both carried with them elements of different cultures, and were of different physical appearance, from those who frequently became their masters. But the assumption that the linkage is biological rather than social lies buried beneath the whole of Afro-American social history and is—in some deformed and refracted way—the mirror image of the Afro-American tradition itself. In what sense this may be so will become clearer at a later point.

The first African slaves to be transported to the New World arrived during the first decade following the "Discovery," and slavery did not end in the New World until Brazilian abolition was decreed by the imperial government at Rio de Janeiro in 1888. Hence the involuntary servitude of Africans and their descendants in this Hemisphere lasted nearly four centuries; its initiation predated the North American Declaration of Independence by nearly three centuries. The precise number of enslaved Africans who reached the New World alive will never be known—nor will the numbers who died in slaving wars and in the hideous coffles to the

coast, during the Middle Passage, or before being debarked in the Americas. Even if we accept the radically reduced estimates of the number of African slaves who reached this Hemisphere (Curtin 1969), New World slavery may well have been the most massive acculturational event in human history (Mintz 1961b: 580).

Aside from special circumstances—as when hispanicized slaves of African origin served as subalterns and assistants to the conquistadores—nearly all the slaves were allocated in terms of the needs of large-scale agriculture. This was especially the case for the production of subtropical commodities, such as tobacco, sugar, and spices, which were finding large and sometimes new markets in Europe. Hence the African slave trade and slavery itself were intimately bound up with the spread of European military and colonial power and with commercial developments, especially in overseas capitalistic agriculture.

New World plantation organization during the sixteenth century and the subsequent two centuries, though of course agricultural, had a very modern—even industrial—cast for its time. This was particularly true for sugar production, where mill operations were tied closely to those of the field, and capital investment in equipment was necessarily heavy. Slaves were used extensively for sugarcane cultivation and sugar production in Brazil and the Hispanic Caribbean in the sixteenth century; in later centuries, similar patterns developed along the Guiana coasts, through the Caribbean islands, on the Pacific coast of Peru, on portions of the Caribbean littoral, in Mexico, and in Louisiana. The relatively highly developed industrial character of the plantation system meant a curious sort of "modernization" or "westernization" for the slaves—an aspect of their acculturation in the New World that has too often been missed because of the deceptively rural, agrarian, and pseudo-manorial quality of slave-based plantation production.

Moreover, the development of plantations to produce commodities for European markets was a vital first step in the history of overseas capitalism. Even more than the exploitation of mines, the plundering of native treasures, or the development of trade patterns with viable indigenous societies, as in much of Asia and parts of Africa, the establishment of the plantation system meant a rooted overseas capitalism based on conquest, slavery and coercion, and

investment and entrepreneurship. The stimulus to overseas commodity production originated in European developments accompanying the accelerated breakdown of European feudalism, the growth and unification of international trade, and the disfranchisement of vast rural European populations as part of the creation of factory cities. Thus, the growth of slave-based economies in the New World was an integral part of the rise of European commerce and industry, while European factory workers were in a position structurally parallel to that occupied by the enslaved and forced-labor strata of New World colonial societies.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the slaved-produced commodities of the subtropical areas outside Europe, particularly in the Caribbean region, were sold to Europe's working masses and, at a later time—especially with the growth of factory-based production of cotton textiles and of other industrial fibers—to local populations in the "underdeveloped" world as well. Here, again, we discern direct relationships between New World slave-based societies and the growth of European power and influence.

Hence the development of slave systems outside Europe was important to European development; the slave economies were in fact dependent parts of European economies; and slavery itself, as it grew in the New World, was an essential ingredient of that westernization of the world outside Europe that has typified the last four centuries of world history.

Afro-American Cultural Creativity

While the demographic spread of peoples of African or part-African ancestry has not been determined solely by the demand for labor, their spread through the centuries has been dominated by that demand. Though granting the provisional nature of his data, Zelinsky (1949) demonstrates that peoples of African origin are still concentrated heavily in the Antilles, coastal Latin America (particularly the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts, but also along the Pacific littoral), and in the South of the United States. Morse (1964: 3) points out, in spite of the obvious inexactness of such calculations, that in 1950, 95 percent of the Negroes and mulattoes in Middle America were in the Antillean islands, while 76 percent

of the Negroes and mulattoes in South America were in Brazil: "In short, of the 33 million Negroes and mulattoes in Latin America in 1950, 27 million were in the Antilles and Brazil."

In any case, however, the distribution of *peoples* must be carefully distinguished from the distribution of *cultures,* even though cultural elements of demonstrable African provenience will probably turn out to be concentrated in the same areas in which peoples whose ancestry is in some degree originally African are found. When we turn to the distribution of cultures we are, of course, dealing with phenomena that can diffuse freely between individuals, and from group to group, without genetic change of any kind. Folklore, dance forms, cuisine, music, aesthetic traditions, language, and all else that is cultural require no genetic transmission —only a readiness to learn new forms. These forms, moreover, may be taken on with their old meanings or with new meanings added; in fragments (a word, an exclamation, a gesture) or in "complexes"; to replace or supplement older forms or, perhaps most commonly, to intermix in some way with them. Even if the word *goober* (from Kongo *nguba*) does not displace *peanut* in everyday speech, its use may lend a sentence regional flavor; "creole" cookery can combine African and European and other elements in a new and distinctive cuisine that differs from all the traditions that sired it; Br'er Rabbit may learn new tricks, some of them European; and the blues may incorporate a few European elements—instrumental, melodic, rhythmic—that seem to serve the musician's purposes.

The ancestors of Afro-Americans could not transfer their cultures to the New World intact, but in this regard they differed from other migrants only in degree. With few exceptions (see, for instance, Pierson 1942: 73; 1953), enslaved Africans were systematically prevented from bringing with them the personnel who maintained their homeland institutions: the complex social structures of their ancestral societies, with their kings and courts, guilds and cult-groups, markets and armies, were not, and could not be, transferred. Cultures are linked as continuing patterns of and for behavior in such social groupings. Since the groupings themselves could not be maintained or readily reconstituted, the capacity of isolated representatives of African societies to perpetuate or to re-

create the cultural contents of the past was seriously impaired. In addition, the slaves were usually unable to regroup themselves in the New World settings in terms of their origins; the resulting cultural heterogeneity of most slave groups limited that which could be shared culturally. It was not, after all, some single "African culture" that was available for transfer. Moreover, the ancestral African cultures, like cultures everywhere, were neither unchanging nor unresponsive. They shared the dynamic quality of all cultures. Thus, at the same time that cultures were transmuted in the New World, they continued to change in the societies of the Old.

Inevitably, Afro-American cultures would take on their characteristic forms under the social and physical conditions with which the slaves themselves had to deal. To probe the consciousness of those millions of Africans as they sought to survive as functioning human beings in the settings into which slavery thrust them is a task which will concern (and, it is hoped, intimidate) generations to come of serious students of Afro-Americana. Surely these human beings, like all others, sought to make comprehensible the destinies imposed upon them by brute force. The daily job of living did not end with enslavement, and the slaves could and did create viable patterns of life, for which their pasts were pools of available symbolic and material resources.

These creative processes had a two-way character, however; not only did the cultures of the slaves come to implicate features of other, non-African origins, but the cultures of nonslaves also assimilated important materials from the African heritage. Such assimilation was especially strong in the expressive aspects of culture, as in Brazilian, Cuban, and North American music, dance, and folklore. So interpenetrated did the heritages of Afro-Americans and other Americans become, in fact, that in many cases it is difficult (if not impossible) to speak of an "Afro-American culture" that is rigorously distinguishable from the wider national culture. This assertion has been put so eloquently by Ralph Ellison (1964: 247–49) that he must be quoted at length:

> Slavery was a vicious system, and those who endured it a tough people, but it was *not* (and this is important for Negroes to remember for the sake of their own sense of who and what their grandparents were) a state of absolute repression.

A slave was, to the extent that he was a *musician,* one who expressed himself in music, a man who realized himself in the world of sound. Thus, while he might stand in awe before the superior technical ability of a white musician, and while he was forced to recognize a superior social status, he would never feel awed before the music which the technique of the white musician made available. His attitude as "musician" would lead him to possess the music expressed through the technique, but until he could do so he would hum, whistle, sing or play the tunes to the best of his ability on any available instrument. And it was, indeed, out of the tension between desire and ability that the techniques of jazz emerged. This was likewise true of American Negro choral singing. For this, no literary explanation, no cultural analyses, no political slogans—indeed, not even a high degree of social or political freedom—was required. For the art—the blues, the spiritual, the jazz, the dance—was what we had in place of freedom.

Technique was then, as today, the key to creative freedom, but before this came a will toward expression. . . . Negro musicians have never, as a group, felt alienated from any music sounded within their hearing, and it is my theory that it would be impossible to pinpoint the time when they were not shaping . . . the mainstream of American music. Indeed, what group of musicians has made more of the sound of the American experience? Nor am I confining my statement to the sound of the slave experience, but am saying that the most authoritative rendering of America in music is that of American Negroes.

For as I see it, from the days of their introduction into the colonies, Negroes have taken, with the ruthlessness of those without articulate investments in cultural styles, whatever they could of European music, making of it that which would, when blended with the cultural tendencies inherited from Africa, express their own sense of life—while rejecting the rest. Perhaps this is only another way of saying that whatever the degree of injustice and inequality sustained by the slaves, American culture was, even before the official founding of the nation, pluralistic; and it was the African's origin in cultures in which art was highly functional which gave him an edge in shaping the music and dance of this nation.

The question of social and cultural snobbery is important here. The effectiveness of Negro music and dance is first recorded in the journals and letters of travelers but it is important to remember that they saw and understood only that which they were prepared to accept. Thus a Negro dancing a courtly dance appeared comic from

> the outside simply because the dancer was a slave. But to the Negro dancing it—and there is ample evidence that he danced it well—burlesque or satire might have been the point, which might have been difficult for a white observer to even imagine. During the 1870's Lafcadio Hearn reports that the best singers of Irish songs, in Irish dialect, were Negro dock workers in Cincinnati, and advertisements from slavery days described escaped slaves who spoke in Scottish dialect. The master artisans of the South were slaves, and white Americans have been walking Negro walks, talking Negro flavored talk (and prizing it when spoken by Southern belles), dancing Negro dances and singing Negro melodies far too long to talk of a "mainstream" to which they're alien.

Ellison is making an exceedingly important point, not only about the innovative resiliency and creative integrity of the slaves, but also about the nature of culture. When we speak of Afro-American cultures, we are speaking of disturbed pasts; but those pasts were carried by successive generations, each dealing with the daily challenges of oppression. The glory of Afro-Americana inheres in the durable fiber of humanity, in the face of what surely must have been the most repressive epoch in modern world history. It depended—had to depend—on creativity and innovation far more than on the indelibility of particular culture contents. Such creative adaptation is, of course, a form of culture change, in which the individual, or a whole mass of individuals sharing certain traditions and values, develops new forms. In one sense, those new forms are American, more than anything else—but "American" here means *new,* means of the New World. We need to discover what actually happens when such new forms—be they musical, linguistic, political, or whatever—take shape. In the case of music, the clues are especially plentiful.

Richard Ligon, an English sugar planter whose remarkable *History of Barbados* (1657) appeared when its author was languishing in debtors' prison, provides us with a moving example of the ways in which the new music was created by the slaves:

> In the afternoons on Sundayes, they have their musicke, which is of kettle drums, and those of several fifes; upon the smallest the best musitian playes, and the others come in as Chorasse; the drum all

men know, has but one tone; and therefore varietie of tunes have little to doe in this musick; and yet so strangely they vary their time, as 'tis a pleasure to the most curious eares, and it was to me one of the strangest noyses that I ever heard made of one tone; and if they had the varietie of tune, which gives the greater scope of musick, as they have of time, they would do wonders in that Art.

I found Macow [a slave] very apt for it of himselfe, and one day coming into the house (which none of the *Negroes* used to doe, unlesse an Officer, as he was,) he found me playing on a Theorbo [archlute], and singing to it which he hearkened very attentively to; and when I had done took the Theorbo in his hand, and strooke one string, stopping it by degrees upon every fret, and finding the notes to varie, till it came to the body of the instrument; and that the nearer the body of the instrument he stops, the smaller or higher the sound was, which he found was by the shortning of the string, considered with himselfe, how he might make some triall of this experiment upon such an instrument as he could come by; having no hope ever to have any instrument of this kind to practise on. In a day or two after, walking in the Plantine grove . . . I found this Negro (whose office it was to attend there) being the keeper of the grove, sitting on the ground, and before him a piece of large timber, upon which he had laid crosse, sixe Billets, and having a handsaw and a hatchet by him, would cut the billets by little and little, till he had brought them to the tunes, he would fit them to: for the shorter they were, the higher the Notes which he tryed by knocking upon the ends of them with a sticke, which he had in his hand. When I found him at it, I took the stick out of his hand, and tried the sound, finding the sixe billets to have sixe distinct notes, one above another, which put me in a wonder, how he of himselfe, should without teaching doe so much. I then showed him the difference between flats and sharpes, which he presently apprehended, as between *Fa,* and *Mi:* and he would have cut two more billets to those tunes, but then I had no time to see it done, and so left him to his own inquiries.

We recognize that the Sunday slave-musicians Ligon was describing played music that was wholly or in good part African in origin. But we also recognize with what skill and interest Macow was preparing to make new music out of old—both European and African—resources. Ellison's assertion that these inventions were perfected ruthlessly, "without articulate investments in cultural styles," is particularly illuminating. Enslaved Africans carried their

cultural heritages into the inferno of slavery with a very different commitment to their ancestral societies than that of the unenslaved. Those heritages, in fact, could be maintained in the new settings only by innovativeness and flexibility. This is what Ellison means when he says that there were no articulate investments in cultural styles; for surely, as he knows well, the cultural styles themselves were already there, embodied in the repertoires of slave musicians as they set out to create a new music.

Language provides us with another such example. A category of languages called "Creoles" is represented by many tongues spoken by Afro-Americans, in such New World areas as Haiti, Surinam, the Dutch Leeward Islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao), the British and French Lesser Antilles, and Louisiana. These languages usually have lexicons that are readily attributed in large part to one or another European language, such as French or Spanish; but the ancestry of their grammars is not so easily determined. Some authorities believe that the grammars are—on at least some levels—African, though there is considerable controversy about this point; in any case, the grammars are not clearly and unmistakably Indo-European. Many linguists believe that the majority of creole languages originated under special conditions of contact between Europeans and Africans, either on the West African coast or in the Caribbean colonies. In a number of cases, however, the creole language eventually became the language of a whole people or nation. Thus Haitian Creole is the national language of Haiti, even though French has always been its official language.

Though it serves useful scientific purposes to determine the origins of particular words and usages in the case of each creole idiom, other scientifically provocative questions concern the nature of creole languages themselves, and the processes of their emergence. Thus, to give a single example, Haitian Creole has numerous words (such as *akansan, marassa, ouanga, afiba,* and the names of many plants, religious ceremonies, and gods) of clearly African origin. But the phrase structure of Creole gives us examples that may or may not be African, yet are not certainly Indo-European. The processes of creole language-formation were in one sense social, involving the interaction of small numbers of people

who spoke European languages with large numbers of people who spoke different African languages. In another regard, these processes were linguistic, involving the adaptation of old content to new uses. As in the case of music, people were busily creating new, synthetic forms out of older materials, both their own and those they borrowed.

Though they may have begun as a means of communication between masters who spoke one language and slaves who spoke several or many different languages, pidgin tongues of this kind eventually came to be the native (read "creole") languages of whole slave communities and—as in the case of Haiti—even of whole countries. One linguist has called such languages the "unwanted step-children of linguistic science," but he has also noted their unusual linguistic character and the even more unusual social circumstances under which they arose (Lounsbury, 1968: 205–6). What is so remarkable about these languages is that they could develop under repressive social conditions until they became the first or native languages of millions of people, even becoming literary languages in some instances. It is not their particular historical roots alone, but also the ways in which they grew, that makes them especially interesting to the Afro-Americanist. And in this perspective, it is not the precise historical origins of a word, a meaning, a phrase, an instrument, or a rhythm that matters, so much as the creative genius of the users, molding older cultural substances into new and unfamiliar patterns, without regard for "purity" or "pedigree."

Misunderstandings about the nature of culture and "cultural purity" occur within the contemporary dialogue of Afro-American studies. If three and one-half centuries of acculturation in the New World have diluted and "contaminated" once pure African cultures, it might conceivably make good sense to argue for the reconstitution of their original purity. But this would mean, among other things, the reconstitution of cultural forms that have in many cases vanished in Africa itself. Nor is this the only difficulty; here is an example of another. In much of West Africa—doubtless the principal source of the ancestors of today's Afro-Americans—islamization of native peoples was an ongoing process during centuries of the slave trade. Such islamization meant, of course, the

supplanting of ancient indigenous African religions by "foreign"—originally non-African—religious beliefs and practices. In the abstract, this implies that in the interest of consistency a quest for African cultural purity would require a rejection of Islam among West Africans, and a reversion to pre-Islamic belief and practice. Yet surely such an idea would be poorly received by the Muslims of Northern Nigeria, for instance, who no doubt consider themselves quite as African as their "pagan" (that is, non-Muslim) neighbors.

Or consider a parallel New World example. In many Afro-American religious groups, elements from African religions and from Christianity have been synthesized into new bodies of belief. Thus, for instance, Catholic saints are merged with African gods, as when the Yoruba Ogun, the Dahomean god of iron and smiths, Gun, appears as St. George, St. Peter, or St. James the Apostle. In Hispanic Afro-America, St. James is sometimes called Santiago Matamoros—St. James the Moor-killer—since he is supposed to have appeared miraculously during the Reconquest, fighting on the side of Catholic Spain. It would be difficult, one supposes, to convince those who believe Santiago Matamoros and Ogun to be one and the same god that he should be expunged from their religion because his presence dilutes or "contaminates" the African past.

The argument here, then, is that we must conceptualize Afro-American cultures not simply as historically derived bodies of materials, as patterns of and for behavior, but also as materials actively employed by organized human groupings in particular social contexts. Without the dimension of human action, of choices made and pursued—of maneuver—culture could be regarded as a lifeless collection of habits, superstitions, and artifacts. Instead, we see that culture is *used;* and that any analysis of its use immediately brings into view the arrangements of persons in social groups, for whom cultural forms confirm, reinforce, maintain, change, or deny particular arrangements of status, power, and identity.

But such validations or denials through the employment of cultural forms depend upon the symbolic associations—the meaning or significance—of each usage for those who hold positions within a given social system or subsystem. Whether it be drinking tea, wearing an Afro hairstyle, or employing certain idiomatic expres-

sions, usages are endowed with meanings apparent to those who habitually practice them, acquire them, or invent them; and appropriate practice confirms a network of understandings, of symbolic accords, corresponding to the networks of social relations within which persons define themselves, act, and interact.

In attempts to trace or recapture the history of a particular culture, both the employment of cultural materials for social maneuver and the symbolic meanings of the forms themselves may be ignored. Yet the social and symbolic significance of such forms in maintaining or changing a society, or the relative positions of the individuals and groups within it, is of primary importance. In fact, the very search for the "origins" of cultural forms may itself be part of social maneuver; if we seek to "prove" that the North Americans invented political democracy, there is implicit in the search the premise that political democracy is a good thing to have invented. Much the same holds true for monotheism, the phonetic alphabet, and the internal-combustion engine; few polemicists set out to prove that their ancestors invented blood sacrifice, the sexual double standard, or the ambush, unless these practices have been either ennobled or repudiated in the interim.

This is by no means to say that the study of historical origins and diffusion is empty of intellectual meaning. Demonstrating that the aboriginal peoples of the New World, Asia, and Africa have contributed massively to the world's total repertory of skills and resources—for example, in terms of domesticated plants and animals, engineering and the sciences, philosophy and aesthetics—has had tremendous influence, both intellectually and politically. Such findings have done much to restore a sense of balance and modesty to the Western view of the world outside.

But the history of a particular skill, artifact, belief, plant, or food is not the same as its employment and the symbolic meanings it has for the members of a continuing society. Culture has "life" because its content serves as resources for those who employ it, change it, incarnate it. Human beings cope with the demands of everyday life through their interpretive and innovative skills, and their capacity for employing symbolism—not by ossifying their behavioral forms, but by using them creatively. Thus, quite aside from the question of historical origins, the cultural resources of

Afro-Americans and of Afro-American cultures are by no means limited to those elements or complexes that are provably African historically; such origins are far less significant than the continuing creative employment of forms, whatever their origins, and the symbolic usages imparted to them.

Afro-America and the Caribbean Region

At an earlier point in this chapter, it was suggested that the assumption of a direct linkage between physique and behavior underlay the whole of Afro-American social history, constituting, in some twisted fashion, a reflection of the Afro-American tradition itself. In practice, and throughout the Hemisphere, the perceived physical differences between Afro-Americans and other Americans has served as a basis for social and economic exclusion and isolation. In turn, this enforced separation, probably clearer and more inviolable in the United States than anywhere else in the Americas, has simplified the oppression of Afro-Americans and limited their access to mobility within the wider society.

The social and economic exclusion of Afro-Americans has been by no means complete, even in the United States, nor are the people who call themselves Afro-Americans in this country genetically homogeneous, or even necessarily identifiable in individual cases as having any African ancestry. Hence, if there is a community of Afro-Americans in the United States (in the widest sense of the term *community*), then it is bound by social ties and by cultural affinities. It is not "race," that is, *but the perception of race differences by the majority,* which has provided an apparent genetic underpinning for the Afro-American community in this country. Since in the United States the cultural development of Afro-Americans has in most cases been accompanied both by the majority imputation of an inherent linkage between physique and behavior, and by the social and economic exclusion of Afro-Americans from large sectors of the national society and its institutions, Afro-American culture in North America has of course been significantly affected by these accompaniments. Consequently, the sociology of prejudice, economic exploitation, and discrimination based on perceived physical differences illuminates the arena within which Afro-

American culture in this country has taken on its characteristic shape.

In the Caribbean region, however, the operation of racial bias has generally been more subtle and more complicated than in the United States. Moreover, the Caribbean region, with its more than fifty island and assorted mainland societies, embraces a wide range of local codes of race relations. Even a casual observer will be struck by the differing tenor of social relations in, say, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Jamaica; were one to add Trinidad and one of the very small, historically somewhat untypical islands, such as Saba or Aruba or Providencia, the picture would be even more complex. It might be possible to chart the differences according to such criteria as the changing relative proportions of Africans and Europeans in each society through the centuries, the varying slavery codes and their varying effectiveness, and the importance or unimportance of the plantation system in each local case; but such is not the point of this presentation. Rather, it needs to be stressed that the perception of race differences by the majority, which has so consistently shored up the operation of racial oppression in the United States, simply has not functioned in the same ways in Caribbean societies. To begin with, in many Caribbean societies—in Haiti or Jamaica, for instance—phenotypically black people *are* the majority. Again, great variations exist in the local codes of social assortment by which persons of intermediate appearance are perceived and treated as members of one social segment rather than another, and in no Caribbean case may one confidently assume a bipolar "racial" system—"white" and "Negro"—of the sort operative for white North Americans. Finally, it should be noted that many Caribbean societies have waged political struggles against their European colonial masters, and problems of race have usually been embedded in wider questions of colonial exploitation, rather than the other way around. There are many other reasons why the Caribbean cases must be viewed differently from that of the United States; but these will be taken up later.

For the purposes of this book, the definition of the Caribbean region has been restricted to the islands extending from Trinidad, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Margarita, and others off the coast of Venezuela in the south, to Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto

Rico—the Greater Antilles—in the north, including all of those islands which stretch in an arc nearly 2,000 miles long from Trinidad to westernmost Cuba, and a few outliers, such as San Andrés and Providencia. We are dealing here with more than fifty inhabited island societies, ranging in size from a few square miles—as is the case for Dutch Saba, English Carriacou, or French Marie Galante—to Cuba, with its 44,000 square miles of area. In terms of contemporary populations, we go from Cuba's more than 8 million inhabitants down to local populations of a few thousands or less.

All of the Caribbean islands lie within a subtropical zone, Trinidad just north of ten degrees north latitude, Cuba at approximately twenty-three degrees north latitude. With climates that may truly be described as "balmy," and possessing soils of unexampled fertility when first invaded by the Europeans, it is hardly surprising that the Caribbean islands were to become the first major sphere of Western colonialism outside Europe itself, the site of the first important overseas capitalist experiments, and the starting place for tropical estate agriculture, the plantation system, and the large-scale New World enslavement of African peoples.

The social history of the Caribbean region shares much both with the South American mainland societies stretching from Brazil northward and with the United States South. Yet the meaning of the Caribbean for Afro-America may be considered apart from these other grand regions, which, together with the Antilles, constitute the core area of Afro-America itself. It was in the Antilles that European force of arms—not to mention European diseases—first put down and destroyed large aboriginal populations; it was in the Antilles that the sugarcane was first imported for world market production; it was in the Antilles that plantations were first established in the New World; and it was in the Antilles that New World slavery reached a dreadful pinnacle of intensity. Even today, the Antilles symbolize, in their variety and complexity, the whole of nearly five full centuries of European hegemony. Here we have the site of the first significant European colony outside Europe itself—Santo Domingo, settled by men from Columbus's crew on the first voyage; and on the same island we find the Republic of Haiti, the first black republic and the second independent nation in

the Hemisphere. In the Antilles, some colonies—such as Barbados, from 1625 until 1966—remained the wards of European masters for the whole of their post-Columbian history. Others were the sites of some of the most brilliant and terrifying revolutions in the modern world. The first American Indian rebellion against the European invaders and conquerors took place on Santo Domingo, as did the first armed resistance of African slaves against their masters.

Within this setting, we seek to define the significance of Afro-Americans for the Caribbean, and of the Caribbean for Afro-Americans. Lowenthal (1960) has stressed effectively the very considerable variability of scale in Caribbean societies. Of the approximately 21,000,000 people in the Caribbean islands, perhaps 85 percent live in societies of more than 1,000,000 inhabitants; less than 10 percent live in societies of from 100,000 to 1,000,000; and only a small fraction in societies of less than 10,000. Though more than half of all Caribbean societies have populations of less than 10,000, the combined populations of islands with under 10,000 people make up only a trivial proportion of the population of the entire area. Thus, the Caribbean region is a highly divided, insular, and small-scale region, as compared with much of the rest of the world.

Let us examine these figures from the point of view of language, in order to fill in further the nature of Caribbean diversity. The major official languages are the European languages of the conquerors: English, French, Dutch, and Spanish. Yet we have noted that the first language of the bulk of the Haitian people is a Creole. The language of the people in the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao is Papiamento, likewise a Creole. The language of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and their outliers is a French-based Creole, as is the language of a substantial part of the populations of Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, and Trinidad. Lucumí, a dialect of Nigerian Yoruba, is still spoken by a number of Cubans. In Trinidad, as in Jamaica, Hindi is still important to most of the descendants of migrants from India, at least for special purposes, while the same is true of Tamil in Martinique. This linguistic diversity reflects not merely the history of the colonial powers but the his-

tory of the Caribbean peoples as well—they came from all over, and they either brought their languages with them or developed new modes of communication in new settings.

If we turn to physical type—to "race," as it is called—we confront a comparable diversity. In dealing with physical type, we began by noticing that local standards of racial classification varied widely in the Caribbean, but nowhere fit neatly with the prevailing United States stereotypes of "white" and "Negro." Hence the use of census figures as a source of description of Caribbean peoples requires care and prudence, and rarely leads to more than obvious generalities. Moreover, since the code of social relations varies from island to island, no confident inferences about behavior can be made from census data.

Speaking very generally, it can be said that among the independent nations people at least in part of African origin predominate numerically in Haiti, Barbados, and Jamaica; they are numerically significant in Santo Domingo and perhaps less so in Cuba. They are still less significant numerically in Puerto Rico, but wholly predominant in nearly all of the Lesser Antilles, with some minor exceptions, and with the major exception of Trinidad, where the population of East Indian extraction makes up nearly one-half of the total. Put another way, the population of discernible African origin in the Antilles as a whole—a matter always subject to local norms of perception and assortment—probably makes up at least 75 percent of the total. The importance and meaning of racial identity in these societies varies significantly from one to another and, to a considerable extent, within the social fabric of each component society. Allowing for all of these qualifiers, the fact remains, however, that the Caribbean region is a core area of contemporary Afro-America.

If we turn from physique to ethnicity and culture, the picture grows yet more complicated and diverse. Some elements of the aboriginal Amerind cultures of the Antilles are still perpetuated in local life—thus, for instance, certain words, foods, and beliefs are attributable to the cultures of the Native Americans who lived in the islands before the Europeans came. Again, much of the content of the local cultures of the Antilles may be traced to Europe, since the Europeans first conquered and colonized the is-