

Chapter Title: SOUND BARRIERS AND SOUND MANAGEMENT

Book Title: Culture on the Margins

Book Subtitle: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation

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Published by: Princeton University Press. (1999)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sc0m.6>

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SOUND BARRIERS AND SOUND MANAGEMENT

Slaves are generally expected to sing as well as to work. A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. "Make a noise, make a noise," and "bear a hand," are the words usually addressed to the slaves when there is silence amongst them.

(*Frederick Douglass, 1845*)

HOW DID the captors, owners, and overseers of slaves hear black music prior to the rise of the abolitionist movement? What did they hear? And how did they respond to or act on what they heard? Prior to the mid-nineteenth century black music appears to have been heard by captors and overseers primarily as *noise*—that is, as strange, unfathomable, and incomprehensible. However, with the rise of the abolitionist movement, black song making became considered increasingly as a font of black *meanings*. Today we recognize this new, mode of hearing, with its emphasis upon the meanings of culture producers, as fundamental to the modern phenomenological and hermeneutic dimensions of cultural interpretation within the social sciences and the humanities.

To comprehend the shift of reception from noise to meaningful sound, we must first sketch the features of earlier modes of hearing. Three distinct modes of hearing black music can be identified: incidental hearing, instrumental hearing, and pathos-oriented hearing. Considering these modes allows us to assess the different ways in which black music making was not just heard but was actually appropriated. By incidental hearing I refer to the kind of accounts logged by white observers who did not intend to hear black music, but who instead stumbled upon it. Their responses reflected little of what we today would acknowledge as sympathetic comprehension. Instrumental hearing, on the other hand, involved attempts by overseers to use music for nonmusical objectives. Owners could induce slaves to sing quick-paced songs to speed up the labor process, or could force them to make sheer sounds as a way to monitor them, or could draw upon a slave's musical skills to augment his or her market value. In contrast, pathos-oriented hearing, as I shall argue, marks the modern humanistic turn; it champions black song making as a window

on the inner lives of slaves. Pathos-oriented hearing is thus the most important cultural development that I trace in this study.

The earliest modes of hearing need to be understood insofar as they provide the basic framework out of which the new ethnosympathetic mode of cultural interpretation emerged. Surveying them allows us to see what had to be challenged in order for a modern mode of meaning-centered interpretation to develop. To hear slave music as noise is an extremely limited interpretation and shaped entirely by slavery. Yet as a restricted cultural framework, “noise” offers, I believe, an analytical base-line from which other modes of hearing black music develop. As a cultural construct, noise enables us to see how ensuing changes in hearing grew from this earlier and most simple yet imperial orientation. Noise, however, is not just sound without meaning. Noise and meaningful sound are opposites, and together they are part of a broader and deeper social construct, a cultural logic, that enables and puts into motion some of the most basic boundary-mapping interpretations of meaning available to those who work with these categories.

In order to bring this logic into focus, I treat noise as an ideal-type against which other modes of hearing can be assessed. The changing schemas of interpreting black music also provide us with an important vantage point from which to view conflicting lines of social and institutional power that intersect the developing interests in the cultural expressions of people on the margins of society. As we shall see, early perceptions of black music as noise do not disappear in the wake of more culturally probing and reflexive modes of interpretation. Nevertheless, the most intense sense of bewilderment and the most strident tones of revulsion were over time muted, absorbed, modified, and recast under the humanitarian reformist impulses of the mid-nineteenth century and the ensuing professionalization of cultural analysis that developed in the latter decades of the century. It is against the early backdrop of noise, however, that we are able to gauge the more elaborate and complex orientations that emerge as new modes of cultural analysis and interpretation.

To explore these issues I shift the emphasis from “black producers” of music to “white consumers” of black music. This allows us to examine how hearing music, not from the perspective of a maker or producer, but from the perspective of an outside observer, is also a cultural practice—the *practice of hearing* the practices of others. This shift is required, I believe, if we are to rethink and reassess the rise and development of modern forms of cultural interpretation, especially in relationship to how new forms of social knowledge were generated within the dominant culture and were applied to the understanding of culture on the racial margins of American society. As I argue throughout the study, the develop-

ment of such knowledge constituted an important intellectual juncture that has had a significant impact upon our sense of modern cultural interpretation.

Emotional Noise

Noise governs the interpretive schemas of the early preabolitionist era.¹ In most cases, when slave traders, owners, overseers, and other listeners heard black music, they heard noise. Earlier, preabolitionist descriptions of slave music characterize its qualities as impenetrable, incomprehensible, and unfathomable. Though scant prior to the nineteenth century, the early observations of black music tend to evoke two interpretive poles. On the one hand observers readily admit an inability, even failure, to understand slave music, often due to language barriers. On the other, they display an emerging comprehension of the meanings attributed to the feelings of the black individuals or groups in whose singing they hear fairly well defined emotions and offer interpretations of what these emotions might mean. Slave singing is interpreted as “doleful,” “mournful,” “melancholy,” “monotonous” and “sad.” But of the two sets of attributes, it is *noise* that overrides the nascent perception of emotional noise.

The first published account of European slave traders that logged observations of African music confronted the language barrier. In 1445, Portuguese slave traders reported that they “could not understand the words of their language.” Yet “the sound” they heard from captured blacks “right well accorded with the measure of their sadness.”² Testifying in 1791 before the British House of Commons investigations of the slave trade, carpenter James Towne described how the slaves on ship were forced under whip to sing and dance. “Have you ever heard the Slaves singing, and have you been acquainted with the subject of their song? I have. I never found it any thing joyous, but lamentations.” Towne, unlike most, claimed to have fathomed their language, and reported that the slaves sang “complaints for having been taken away from their friends and relations.”³ Ship surgeon Alexander Falconbridge, who witnessed slaves forced to sing and dance on the slave ships, noted their song making as being “generally, as may naturally be expected, melancholy lamentations of their exile.”⁴ Other early observations gathered from slave ships describe slave singing as a “wild yell,” as “[making] merry, when their heart was sad,” and in a “plaintive tone, when left to themselves.” Terms like “rude and uncouth,” “strange,” “wild,” and “devoid of all softness” indicate a dominant sensibility with regard to black music and tend to place it on the farthest margins of social value, at

the borders of culture and civilization. Perceived as fundamentally incoherent and without distinct meaning, black music was simply defined consistently within the dehumanizing social classifications of blacks as chattel. This, of course, fit within a culture that endorsed the idea that “in seventeenth century Virginia a master could not murder a slave. He might cause his death, but he could not legally murder him.”⁵

As black music began to be appraised with increasing sympathy, it also became more comprehensible. Yet even among sympathizers, black music remained enigmatic. Frederick Law Olmsted, who traveled extensively in the South as a journalist in the mid-1850s and who was critical of slavery, described slaves singing during a black funeral procession he witnessed in Washington, D.C., in 1853 as

a wild kind of chant. . . . [A]n old negro . . . raised a hymn, which soon became a confused chant—the leader singing a few words alone, and the company then either repeating them after him or making a response to them, in the manner of sailors heaving at the windlass. I could understand but very few of the words. The music was wild and barbarous, but not without a plaintive melody.⁶

Reminiscent of many earlier accounts, Olmsted’s description remained ensconced within what we might call the “barbarous-plaintive” dichotomy. These two interpretive dispositions—one standing in perplexity at the barrier of language and culture, the other signaling a presumed insight into the window of human emotions—continues well into the nineteenth century.

References to the emotions of slaves increased in frequency and in descriptive elaboration during the abolitionist period, and became a salient feature of what came to be associated with the Negro spiritual. The division, however, between intellectual incomprehensibility and irrepressible emotional knowledge continued as well. During the Civil War, Elizabeth Coxe witnessed a “negro prayer meeting” on her father’s South Carolina plantation. “I remember a slight thrill of alarm one night that winter when D. and I heard very wild singing at their church. . . . [It was a] scene of barbaric frenzy that I have since thought the howling Dervishes reminded me of.”⁷ Coxe did not make the same empathic reach that Mary Boykin Chestnut did when the latter attended a Negro church gathering during which she was exposed to words that had “no meaning at all,” though she “wept bitterly” in response.

The combination of unfathomable noise and fathomable emotions signals a peculiar disposition toward black music and a capacity to hear what we might call *emotional noise*. This double-dimensional hearing that coupled a sense of meaninglessness with a sense of meaning marks, I believe, the beginning of an important cultural and interpretive renegoti-

ation in the hearing process that eventually yielded a more subjectivistic orientation toward black music, one that became increasingly attuned to the meanings of black subjects. As an early recognition of emotions it was an incipient as well as feeble sensibility, but it grew in importance and developed most rapidly in the early-nineteenth century, when it was aided in critically important ways by the publication of the slave narratives, which coincided with the emergence of humanistic modes of cultural reception. With the slave narratives (which I discuss in a later chapter), the inner dimensions of black lives were opened up for the first time to white readers, and black and white abolitionists were able to begin mining emotional noise. And they did so by bringing to it accounts that were more reflexively refined, accounts that also resulted in a new as well as a major reinterpretation of black music. I will return later to this important issue of emotional recognition, which was only nascent in the earliest accounts but which reached a quite sophisticated stage by the Civil War.

Noise as Ideal-Type

Noise is, by definition, a messy problem. However, it is helpful to treat noise conceptually as an ideal-type. This requires creating a construct that is something of an analytical fiction—for as Max Weber has argued, in social science there are no “pure” or “ideal” ideas in themselves, but constructs that are indispensable as “heuristic” devices. The concept of “ideal-type” is Weber’s astute contribution to confronting the human and socially constructed dimension of all analytical ideas or conceptual formations. The ideal-type works this way: We confront a myriad of statements, observations, examples, cases, practices, or procedures and sift for lines of thematic continuity. We then attempt to extract or distill from the variation at hand a narrow set of features that might highlight or accentuate the features of the social pieces of what we wish to comprehend. The intellectual construct itself, derived from attempts to pull the features (which are ultimately analytical ideas) into relationship, is an ideal-type. We then attempt to bring the social pieces of concern into approximate closeness or distance with the constructed ideal-type.

To treat noise in an ideal-typical manner requires isolating and highlighting the notion of noise in order to ascertain its narrowest conceptual meaning. Basically, noise is sound out of order. It is sound that lacks—and even defies—organization. As such it cannot be grasped because the schemas with which it is to be comprehended lack the categories for processing it along lines of order. Noise simply evades. It eludes culturally normative categories of cognition because it does not fit them; it is rejected sound that spills out of, or flows over, the preferred channels along

which known, accepted, and regulated sounds occur. Sound that cannot be meaningfully placed is aberrant sound, sound out of place. Noise defined as such is difficult to fathom; it is resistant to capture—for to capture it would be tantamount to transforming noise into sound, to securing noise a place, to granting it its own grammar, or to allowing it to enter into a recognized grammar. In giving it such logic, such significance, noise would cease to be noise, and would be transmogrified into meaningful sound.

When applied to the reception of black music, the problem of pure noise is never really found. But to treat it as an ideal-type allows us to generate and assess the distinctions and variations with regard to how hearing patterns approximate or diverge from noise. As we move closer to the ideal-type of black music as sheer noise, there is room only for an increasingly restricted and one-sided view of black music as incomprehensible and with alien qualities that place it outside of any kind of recognition. Such views are authorized interpretive angles from *above* and *outside* of black music making. The problem of meaning and point of view thus becomes a stark contrast in black and white. The ear is thus involved in seeing, and such views appear to have no investment whatsoever in the sensuous cultural work of music insofar as the meaning making of slaves is of importance. The slave's inner world remains eclipsed.

Yet as the long history of scholarship on slave music has shown, the production of music and other cultural forms enabled slaves to collectively exercise symbolic control. Song making helped them comprehend their fate and wrest from their conditions some sense of order. But to hear only noise is to operate from outside of what Frederick Douglass called the "inner circle"; it is tantamount to being oblivious to the structures of meaning that anchored sounding to the hermeneutic world of the slaves. To perceive only noise is to remain removed from how slave soundings probed their circumstances and cultivated histories and memories, even though the enterprise of music making was continually made fragile by the ever-present threat of social dislocation and violence. The most ideal-typical and simpleminded notion of noise thus approximates the dominant society's cultural incapacity to grasp how slaves created, cultivated, and maintained shared cognitive maps. As an interpretive schema, noise is simply a din that prevents the powerful from perceiving the collective symbolic enterprise of the dominated, those very practices that twentieth-century scholars would come to call "slave culture." This deeper, vibrant, subterranean culture and the meanings that it entailed could only be, at best, a feeble hunch to the managers of chattel, even when they were able to muster a sympathetic recognition of black emotions behind the otherwise "crude," "uncouth," and "rough" noise made by slaves.

But pure, unfathomable noise (like a pure idea) did not really exist. Far too many of the accounts of owners and overseers that describe black noise also contain a deeper unraveling of noise—an unraveling toward the irrepressible acknowledgment of meaningful emotions. Time after time, observers attribute meaningful emotions that crop up in descriptions of black songs. The recognition of emotions that were latent from the outset becomes increasingly manifest, and erupts with great and irreversible importance in the early-nineteenth century to become one of the most central shanks of modern social and cultural interpretation.

Hearing of course always takes place within cultural settings. It is a social and cultural act whose functions cannot be separated from social, cultural, and historical forces; it is situated perception. When captors, owners, and overseers heard black song making in the context of slavery, they were hearing not just unrecognizable sounds; they heard *within* slavery. This is just as much the case for the northerners, black as well as white, from free states who traveled or lived for some time in the South and heard slave music. At the height of the discovery of the Negro spiritual during the Civil War, William Allen, who assembled the first major collection of such songs, stated the working assumption of many abolitionists when he compared “negro music” that was “*civilized* in its character” because of the “influence of association with the whites,” to music that was “intrinsically barbaric.”⁸ Songs of the “barbaric element” fell beyond the civilized boundary marked by the Christian spiritual, and could be heard only as unrecognized and unapproved noise. From the time of the earliest observation through most of the nineteenth century there remained a considerable body of black song making that was not readily accessible even to those whites whose interest in humanitarian reformism carried them to the racial and cultural margins.

Even the black abolitionist Charlotte Forten Grimke, grand-daughter of the prominent black Philadelphian sailmaker Charles Forten, carried deeply ingrained presumptions of slaves, presumptions circumscribed by slavery. Grimke was invited in 1862 to aid in helping the recently freed slaves residing on St. Helena Island off the coast of South Carolina. She noted in her journal on January 31, 1863: “We had a lovely row [to Beaufort] across,—at noon—in the brightest sunlight. But neither going nor coming did the boatman sing, which disappointed me much. The Sergeant said these were not singers—*that* is most surprising. I thought *everybody* sang down here. Certainly every boat crew *ought*.”⁹ Slaves evidently were all supposed to be singing subjects, especially when they labored to serve others. Grimke too, though herself a free black from the North, heard within slavery. Her presumptions were also shaped by a deeper, older, cultural ideology rooted in a proslavery apologetics that

was inherited, adopted, and readapted by well-intentioned romanticist and reformist entrepreneurs. Grimke's presumptions were part of an interpretive schema that was endorsed by prominent radical white abolitionists who worked with an already deeply routinized link between blacks and music—of blacks as singing people. Such hearing, structured as it was by the peculiar institution, was neither innocent nor exempt from the context in which it took place. Slavery comprised as well as compromised both the social nature of soundings made by slaves and the ears of even the most sympathetic nonslaves who heard them.

As would be expected, comprehension and understanding of black song making became somewhat more sophisticated by the nineteenth century. As slaves developed an ease with the English language they could continue melding remnants of Africanisms that they managed to retain (“survivals”) with new cultural practices, especially those made available to them through Christian proselytization.¹⁰ But even well after slaves developed a facility with spoken English and had internalized aspects of Christian teachings into their cultural practices, the persistent view was that black music making that was not religious singing was alien and incomprehensible.

The Work of Music

Black music did not have to be fathomed and understood to be pulled into service by the planter and overseer classes. That they would not understand the slave as a human, a subject, did not matter; nor did they need to understand their music (at least until the concern for extending Christian teachings began to take on importance in the early-nineteenth century). Along with the laboring body of the slave came the music of slaves, and both were harnessed. Overseers and owners were quick to use music. Even on the slave ships music was coerced out of slaves as they were forced to exercise in order to look lively on the auction blocks.

Whether they were coerced or acted by their own will, slaves put music to work. To slaves, music was cultural work—the work of solidarity. Through music slaves were able to ease the harshness of their lot while exercising one of the few options available for a collective black voice. For overseers, music aided in the management of work as well as the management of slaves. Music was thoroughly incorporated into the labor process and became a common adjunct to carrying out work, though its performance usually meant different things to slaves and overseers. Slaves with musical skills were also pressed into service to entertain the planter class. Sometimes this entertainment overlapped with the function of dissi-

pating or syphoning off deep social tensions, which were put aside during harvest festivals and holidays, when both owners and the owned celebrated together. Thus a slave's musical skills and competencies were often valued, and musical attributes increased a slave's worth both domestically and as a marketable commodity. These forms of musical usage, which I will discuss, reflect not so much a listener's understanding of black music, but rather an instrumentalist orientation that enabled masters and overseers to pull music into a larger sphere of slave surveillance and management. In this regard, owners and overseers did not understand black soundings in a phenomenological sense—this only came about with the aid of black cultural instructions and interpretive guidance in narratives penned by former slaves—but they nonetheless imposed their own limited comprehension upon the music by treating it as a resource to be cultivated, manipulated, and exploited, and linked it to strategies of chattel management and social control.

As noted, from the very earliest moments of capture aboard slave ships, slaves were forced to make sounds, to move, and to jump in their chains. Slavers called this “exercise,” and its purpose was to stave off the depression and lethargy of their dispirited human cargo, for many slaves died in passage. Exercising the slaves was ostensibly aimed at preparing them to appear vigorous and vital, and in some cases at simply keeping them alive. Getting the slaves to move about on deck usually required physical inducement such as whipping them with the “cat” (cat-o’-nine-tails). West Indian planter John Riland provided an account of his experiences on a slave ship, and of these required bouts of “exercise” that appear to have been standard operating procedures in transporting slaves across the Middle Passage:

The captain wanted the slaves to dance; but they did not seem disposed to comply with his wish. He began to dance himself, by way of setting them an example; but they shewed no inclination to follow it, till the *cat* was called for. Then, indeed, they began to sing and skip about. A few, however, were content to have the *cat* smartly applied across their shoulders several times, before they would so much belie their feelings as to make merry, when their heart was sad. . . . An air of dejection appeared in the faces of most of them. . . . They were very averse to any kind of exercise; and, when they danced, their whole aim seemed to be to make noise enough to please the captain.¹¹

The terms “singing” and “dancing” that have come to be commonly used in the early literature appear just as much to be euphemisms for forced soundings and the pain-induced rapid motion of slaves in shackles. Of course slaves were quite capable of singing and dancing, these being fun-

damental dimensions of deep cultural value to most peoples of the world. But it is not likely that individuals ripped from their homes and families, shackled by strangers, and forced upon ships and whipped would break into spontaneous song and dance in ways that are usually signified by these terms (that is, ritual and celebration). From the onset music emerged in a profoundly coercive context where its progressive incorporation into the entire system of slave management was launched.

Proper Music and the Rate of Work

Frederick Douglass's recollection of how overseers distrusted the "silent slave" and insisted that slaves "make a noise" during working suggests that sound making was a requisite to appease the discomfort of owners who preferred to know that whatever occupied the slave's mind was not inimical to the well-being of overseers. Overseers, however, often viewed slaves as having plenty of inimical qualities of mind. As Frederick Douglass recalled, there were many ways in which a slave's presumed demeanor could elicit retribution.

Does a slave look dissatisfied? It is said, he has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting high-minded, and should be taken down a button-hole lower. Does he forget to pull off his hat at the approach of a white person? Then he is wanting in reverence, and should be whipped for it. Does he venture to vindicate his conduct when censured for it? Then he is guilty of impudence,—one of the greatest crimes of which a slave can be guilty. Does he ever venture to suggest a different mode of doing things from that pointed out by his master? He is indeed presumptuous, and getting above himself; and nothing less than flogging will do for him. If slaves were discouraged from talking, their silence was at times just as likely to elicit retribution.¹²

Overseers could easily monitor slaves who were forced to sing just to make noise; they could also limit as well as monitor what kind of auditory exchanges slaves could carry out. Coerced soundings checked silence as well as ordinary dialogue. In this regard singing from the perspective of the owner was not meant to be a means of communication; on the contrary, it was supposed to trim or shut down slave communication. Of course the studies that reveal the opposite are now quite numerous. As former slave Harriet Tubman observed, singing was a way to displace talk. "Slaves," wrote Tubman, "must not be seen talking together," but they could sing. Singing thus filled in where everyday discourse was prevented: "And so it came about that their communication was often made by singing."¹³

But any singing? Not according to Frances Anne Kemble, an English actress and wife of an American slave owner. According to Kemble, it was “cheerful” music that overseers preferred.

Many masters and overseers on these plantations prohibit melancholy tunes or words and encourage nothing but cheerful music . . . deprecating the effect of sadder strains upon the slaves whose peculiar musical sensibilities might be expected to make them especially excitable by any songs of a plaintive character, having any reference to their particular hardships.¹⁴

Cheerful songs presumably blocked the slaves from singing songs that reflected their “particular hardships.” By making such distinctions between “cheerful” and “sadder strains,” and by preferring the emotive expressions of the former, owners and overseers displayed their capacity to grasp (correctly it seems) the emotional investments slaves placed in songs. Embedded in this distinction is the latent issue of whether slaves possibly had subjectivity. As we shall see in later chapters, when the abolitionists discover black music, they reverse this emotive valuation almost to a tune: plaintive and sad strains become much more credible than secular and presumably light, frivolous, and even happy music associated with minstrelsy. Both of these problems—whether blacks had subjectivity and what the abolitionist’s strategies of appropriation were—are issues to which we shall return. The interest in, and intervention into, music went beyond the mere preference for soundings free of sad or plaintive strains. By the middle of the nineteenth century music had already become recognized as a feature of the pace of labor itself. Along with bodies, muscles, and limbs, music was integrated into the labor process.¹⁵

Evidence that the reflection upon music had evolved into a more rationalized mode of appropriation appeared in the pages of *De Bow’s Review* in 1855. An article entitled “Management of Negroes” suggested that slaves should not be allowed to sing “drawling tunes” that might slow work down, and recommended instead labor-appropriate music such as “whistling or signing some lively tune.”¹⁶ Commenting on overseers’ attempts to regulate the pace of work by manipulating tempo, Eugene Genovese notes that slave masters “encouraged quick-time singing among their field slaves” as an aid to increase output. Quick songs induced the speedup of the labor process. Slaves, however, sometimes “proved themselves masters of slowing down the songs and the work.”¹⁷

Music was by no means the entire expression of coercion and labor. Though music was often forced from them, slaves also relied heavily upon music as one of the few symbolic forms in which they could collectively indulge. Music making was also a refuge where a great deal of important communication could take place, and became especially crucial, fragile, and precious when mere talk among slaves was strongly dis-

couraged or when talk itself was not enough to meet their collective need to work out the pain of slavery. In 1862, James Miller McKim, a former Presbyterian minister and early founding member of the Anti-Slavery Society, visited the Sea Islands of South Carolina, where he observed slaves working. Intrigued by the frequent combination of song with work, he asked where the songs came from. The answer:

“Dey make em, sah.” “How do they make them?” After a pause, evidently casting about for an explanation, he said, “I’ll tell you; it’s dis way. My master call me up and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it and is sorry for me. When dey come to de praise meeting dat night dey sing about it. Some’s very good singers and know how; and dey work it in, work it in, you know; till dey get it right; and dat’s de way.”¹⁸

Song making helped broker the conditions of work, but it also eased the aftermath of brutal punishment, stretching even further the social functions of music. Such recourse to music also served to absorb and hide pain from the overseer. Blues musician Booker T. White recalled stories told him by a 110-year-old black woman, herself a former slave. While working in the fields, the slaves would actually cry the songs out: “sing[ing] them songs so pitiful, and so long. . . . “[W]hen they see the boss coming they would make like a gnat got in their eye. ’Cos you know, the boss didn’t want them to feel that-a-way, you know, they had to be cool, play it cool, you know.”¹⁹

William Allen, one of the key compilers of black religious songs, recalled observing the continuous singing of stevedores loading and unloading ships at the wharves in Philadelphia and Baltimore: “I have stood for more than an hour, often, listening to them, as they hoisted and lowered the hogsheads and boxes of their cargoes; one man taking the burden of the song (and the slack of the rope) and the others striking in with the chorus. They would sing in this way more than a dozen different songs in an hour.”²⁰ Allen gives no indication that the stevedores are being forced to sing. On the contrary, Allen suggests that the black workers who produced the music might have been developing their own therapeutic response to the drudgery of labor.

Yet the historical roots of the incorporation of music making in the labor process can also lead to the conflation of the two as an essential racial trait. Such would be expected from those who defended slavery. But northern abolitionists were influenced as well by racialized cultural mores that pervaded the culture, and these mores shaped their conceptions of social nature. Few white abolitionists had the sensitivity toward blacks of the former Unitarian minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who commanded an all-Negro regiment for the Union Army during the

Civil War. Higginson, however, in his romantic descriptions of the black troops under his supervision, also conflated historical pressures with natural essences.

Never have I beheld such a *jolly scene of labor*. Tugging these wet boards over a bridge of boats ashore, then across the slimy beach at low tide, then up a steep bank, and all in one great uproar of merriment for two hours. Running most of the time, chattering all the time, snatching the boards from each other's backs as if they were some coveted treasure, getting up eager rivalries between different companies, pouring great choruses of ridicule on the heads of all shirkers, they made the whole scene so enlivening that I gladly stayed out in the moonlight for the whole time to watch it. And all this without any urging or any promised reward, but simply as *the most natural way of doing the thing*. The steamboat captain declared that they unloaded the ten thousand feet of boards quicker than any white gang could have done it; and they felt it so little, that, when, later in the night, I reproached one whom I found sitting by a campfire, cooking a surreptitious opossum, telling him that he ought to be asleep after such a job of work, he answered, with the broadest grin,—

“O no, Cunnel, da's no work at all, Cunnel; dat only jess enough for stretch we.”²¹

Higginson might have indulged in another conflation, that the boards hauled by the black soldiers were the spoils of a raid they had just completed in “rebel” country. The troops had carried out a successful strike against the hated Slave Power. The glee of carrying on their backs the booty of war might just as likely explain their gusto.

Well after slavery was abolished, the link between labor and song remained, as if tied firmly to the cultural anchor of slavery. Even at the end of the century the tradition of incorporating and rewarding the role of music in the labor process was still observable. The American Folk-Lore Society reported that in the “canning industry establishments in Baltimore . . . the leading singers are actually paid more by their employers, showing that their leading has a distinct money value from the capitalist's point of view.”²² The article offers no indication that singing increased the productivity of labor, but only that the singing laborer was preferred to the one “who merely did his work and kept still.”

Testimony from several persons present tended to show that the singing of the slaves at work was regarded by their masters as almost indispensable to the quick and proper performance of the labor, and that the leaders of the singing were often excused from work that they might the better attend to their part of the business. The statement was also made that on the Missis-

sippi in the old days, the wharf laborers were selected and retained largely because of their ability as singers, a good singer being regarded as worth more on the wharves than a laborer who merely did his work and kept still about it.²³

Booker T. Washington noted the music-labor linkage as well: "Often-times in slavery, as to-day in certain parts of the South, some man or woman with an exceptional voice was paid to lead the singing, the idea being to increase the amount of labor by such singing."²⁴ Charles Peabody provided an account in 1903 of work songs being performed by Negro laborers who were assisting in an excavation of a mound for the Harvard Peabody Museum. Acknowledging the link between song and the labor process, Peabody wrote:

Most of the human noise of the township was caused by our men, nine to fifteen in number, at their work. On their beginning a trench at the surface, the woods for a day would echo their yelling with faithfulness. The next day or two these artists being, like the Bayreuth orchestra, sunk out of sight, there would arise from behind the dump heap a not unwholesome murmur as of the quiescent Furies. Of course this singing assisted the physical labor in the same way as that of sailors tugging ropes or of soldiers invited to march by drum and band. They tell, in fact, of a famous singer besought by his co-workers not to sing a particular song, for it made them work too hard, and a singer of good voice and endurance is sometimes hired for the very purpose of arousing and keeping up the energy of labor.²⁵

Well into the twentieth century, music historian Newman White observed the preference that employers had for the musical skills of black workers: "I myself have seen gangs of Negro laborers in North Carolina and Alabama working to songs started by a song-leader, and have been told by several men who have been in charge of construction gangs in various Southern states that it is a common practice to give the leader extra pay."²⁶

These examples do more than just connect blacks and labor in the context of slavery. Such descriptions cut a deeper common trail across the great cultural divide. Slave owners drew their own linkages between slave labor and the perpetually happy singing subject and used them as a defense of slavery. Antislavery northerners drew such linkages as well, not in defense of slavery but in support of a subtler, more modern, and incorporative notion of labor and racial dispositions. Even in the protoethnographic accounts by abolitionists like William Allen, James McKim, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the interpretive framework linking work and the disposition for it with song was still in operation. As we shall see, these cultural attitudes toward black music tended to smooth

fate's rough edge. Slaves may have made music in order to negotiate their social location, but the new discoverers turned toward cultural appreciation as a way to buffer themselves from the social pain of a deeply embedded color line. This adjudicating sensibility echoes across many of the modern end-of-century accounts of folklorists and social scientists.

Musical Leisure beyond the Pleasure Principle

Music also had value to owners and overseers beyond the day-to-day labor process. Slaves provided a major source for the entertainment needs of masters, especially during holidays, harvest times, and other special occasions. On such special days, musical talents were often given free reign. Slaves with musical skills were considered valuable, and musical attributes not only distinguished a slave; they enhanced the slave as a commodity. An exceptionally good musician was also more mobile, fulfilling requests from other owners for the use of his or her services.

Advertisements in colonial newspapers reveal among other things the qualities, skills, and attributes that owners valued in slaves. According to Eileen Southern, slave advertisements generally fell into three categories: "those offering slaves for sale; those offering slaves 'for hire' by the day, week, month, or even year; and those giving notice of runaway slaves. If a slave possessed special skills, the advertisement emphasized this, for a skilled craftsman or a musician commanded a better price than a field hand."²⁷ Solomon Northup, an excellent fiddler, wrote in his narrative how fortunate he was to have such sought-after musical skills, for his fiddling presented opportunities that he would not otherwise have had.²⁸

Alas! had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses—relieved me of many days' labor in the field—supplied me with conveniences for my cabin—with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes. . . . It heralded my name round the country—made me friends, who, otherwise would not have noticed me—gave me an honored seat at the yearly feasts, and secured the loudest and heartiest welcome of them all at the Christmas dance.²⁹

Such celebratory occasions at which a fortunate musician like Northup might play were high points that punctuated the long year of arduous labor. As Eugene Genovese notes, former slaves frequently recalled corn shuckings as their best times.³⁰ But on such occasions the function of music served more than the coercive whims of masters; it was pulled into dimensions of master-slave relations in ways that were special only to such rare moments of collective celebration. Seasonal corn husking and

certain other types of labor, for example, turned into events that allowed slaves as well as whites to associate on more convivial but inevitably fleeting terms, circumscribed by the specific occasion. Lewis Paine, a white native of Providence, Rhode Island, provides an important observation of how slaves and whites sometimes shared harvest time festivities: “Log-rollings and [corn] shuckings are always participated in by the whites. These sports are episodes in their lives. They are like oases to the weary traveler of the desert; they help to enliven the sad journey of life; they are faint rays that shine over the dark voyage.”³¹ Paine’s description of black and white participation indicates that the event provided not just entertainment, but also a particular kind of temporary release for both groups from the norms and mores of everyday life under slavery.

They generally so arrange matters, as to get [the work] done before night, when they take up their line of march for the house; and, on arriving there, take a drink all round. Then commence their gymnastic exercises. They wrestle, jump, and run foot-races. Black and white all take part in the sport, and he who comes off victorious has an extra sip of the “white eye.” After indulging in these exercises as long as they wish, some one calls for a fiddle—but if one is not to be found, some one “pats juber.” This is done by placing one foot a little in advance of the other, raising the ball of the foot from the ground, and striking it in regular time, while, in connection, the hands are struck slightly together, and then upon the thighs. In this way they make the most curious noise, yet in such perfect order, it furnishes music to dance by. *All indulge in the dance.* The slaves, as they become excited, use the most extravagant gestures—the music increases in speed—and the Whites soon find it impossible to sustain their parts, and they retire. This is just what the slaves wish, and they send up a general shout, which is returned by the Whites, acknowledging the victory.³²

This ritual of collective play and conviviality capping a season’s work suggests a rare concession on the part of the slaveholding class. A fleeting and momentary equality arising in the brief suspension of master-slave relations takes place in the sphere of play where whites and blacks participate on an equal basis. But after the dancing escalates, the whites, according to Paine’s description, acknowledge the superior dancing skills of the slaves and retreat as audience. Paine notes a victory conceded to the slaves. With the whites out of the dance, “[the slaves] all sing out, ‘Now show de white man what we can do!’ And with heart and soul they dive into the sport, until they fairly exceed themselves. It is really astonishing to witness the rapidity of their motions, their accurate time, and the precision of their music and dance. I have never seen it equalized in my life.”³³ Paine’s observation of the festive incident indicates no coercion. Rather, it reflects how Paine and others of his class were somewhat captured by

the “curious noise” and the “extravagant gestures” of the slaves as they watched both whites and blacks interact in singing and dancing. But it also demonstrates how even in the rigid social relations of slavery there could occur a transitory event (in the sphere of play) during which roles of winners and losers could be reversed.³⁴ That slaves could at times express happiness was seized upon by defenders of slavery. Such images of contented slaves were strongly cultivated in minstrelsy, the most widespread form of popular culture in the two decades before the Civil War, and the views of slaves as singing subjects pervaded the North.

Nevertheless the legacy of noise ran deep and wide. Despite barriers to comprehension, owners and overseers attempted to harness black noise and manage black music making much as they did any other exploitable attribute of one’s property. The utilitarian linkage between music and forced labor drew upon the deep cultural orientation through which owners and overseers heard black music as noise; it cultivated as well the notion of a black essence naturally yoked to forced labor. This linkage was the cultural underpinning of the dominant mode of conceptualizing and appropriating black music, and it grew out of the predominantly utilitarian orientation toward slave music. It was this cultural anchorage that offended the most radical sensibilities of the abolitionists and the one that they tried to dislodge.

Three Modes of Hearing

I can now identify three modes of hearing that make up the significant orientations toward black music: *incidental hearing*, *instrumental hearing*, and *pathos-oriented hearing*. They are not rigid categories; indeed, they shade into one another and overlap in operations. Each mode, however, involves interests, intentions, and investments (attending to the expressions of others is never a neutral act), but these also vary greatly. Owners, overseers, and free white northerners who visited the South logged observations of music that reveal important insights into what they heard, how they heard, and why they heard, and into the context in which they heard black music. Furthermore, their accounts tell us about how they reacted to or acted upon the music of slaves.

Orientations, like dispositions, are not just sensibilities; they are cultural logics informed by ideas, interests, intentions, and actions.³⁵ These vary in complexity as they develop and differ from the most basic ideal-type notion of black music as unintelligible noise. Incidental hearing represents perhaps the most analytically simple relationship to black music, for it is the least encumbered by any overt interest in music. In a sense, incidental hearing is often accidental hearing. Music is happened upon,

and this can take many forms: a visitor is present at a plantation where slaves are witnessed working or celebrating; or happens to be at a seaport where slaves are loading or unloading cargo; or is in the town where slaves are being auctioned; or encounters a black religious gathering. He or she does not intend to hear music, and being in those places was not motivated by an a priori desire to hear black song making. But hearing music happens anyway, for incidental hearing is fundamentally inadvertent.

Yet when observers recorded and published their inadvertent observations, these were pulled into a much broader context in which struggles over the definitions of black music took place. A written record of incidental observations could have and, in many cases, did have important cultural consequences. In some cases, such writings were the first installments of critical insight into the more complicated place of black music in antebellum America. The journal entries, travel narratives, and memoirs of Frances Kemble, Fredrika Bremer, and Frederick Law Olmsted contain many accounts of slave music.³⁶ These particular writings and others like them were important not only to white readers of their own period. They have also taken on important archival status since their publication, and virtually every major historian and social scientist interested in antebellum black culture has combed through their pages. These early observers were not motivated by a distinct interest in identifying, pursuing, and capturing knowledge of black music. Nonetheless, their writings can be read as prescient examples of what would later become known elements of formal ethnographic work, as individuals extracted a more refined notion of *ethnos* from the socially exploratory frameworks of travel narratives, formal literary narratives, and natural history writing. Most important, others who were passionate about fathoming black music as a cultural entity in its own right read their observations and drew upon the knowledge and insights of these incidental hearers had presented.

But not all incidental hearing was of this caliber. Observing the large gatherings of slaves that took place on Sundays at “Congo Square” in New Orleans led architect Benjamin Latrobe to write in the early-nineteenth century of practices he found detestable. “The allowed amusements of Sunday have, it seems, perpetuated here those of Africa among its inhabitants. I have never seen anything more brutally savage, and at the same time dull & stupid, than this whole exhibition.”³⁷ There are also many observations made by Protestant ministers who heard the collective singing of slaves as noisy expressions of heathenism and who began introducing slaves to Christian teachings. Incidental hearing thus can produce morally incensed responses that run the gamut from sociological insight, to disgust, to abolitionist-tinged sympathy and sentimentalism. Even the most sympathetic incidental hearers made a mixed and ambivalent sense

of black music and questioned whether it was noise or meaningful sound. Most important, incidental hearing is not based on an attempt to harness and make use of black music, and its reactions can take many forms. It is the unintentional orientation toward music, the lack of a central preoccupation with music, that is the characteristic feature behind this kind of hearing.

Making use of black music is precisely what the instrumentalist and the pathos-oriented modes of hearing attempt. Both spring from motivations to appropriate black music. Instrumental hearing, however, is fundamentally utilitarian. It treats music as one of many available resources within a slave. Like strength, fertility, youth, and so forth, musical ability is an attribute that can be exploited—all within the goal-oriented considerations of achieving outcomes that rest fundamentally upon, and firmly within, the maintenance of slavery as an institution. Thus a seller goads his slaves to sing and dance to increase their appearance as valuable commodities on the auction block; an overseer forces song from the workers to increase the pace of labor or to monitor them within earshot; a master sets time aside for the slaves to sing for his guests or to sing among themselves as a way of discharging tensions; a minister insists that certain hymns be sung with words that endorse the religious interpretation of subservience and duty to God's order of things. In short, the instrumentalist mode of hearing tends to be strong on noise and comparatively weak on meaning, for the listener has no overriding incentive to fathom the hermeneutic dimensions of black expressions. The opposite is the case: the meanings generated by slaves must be disavowed, repressed, or interpreted in ways that continually legitimate slavery—such is the case even when “noise” is primarily heard by listeners who nonetheless feel compelled to note the existence of human emotions or when the explanation of slave singing in general is considered a testimony to the benevolence of the peculiar institution. The extent to which repression cannot be carried out requires that indomitable expressions be harnessed as best as possible toward the maintenance of slavery.

The pathos-oriented mode of hearing breaks significantly from both incidental and instrumental hearing. It is fundamentally the antislavery sensibility that makes it possible as an emergent social form of cultural perception and classification. And it is the kind of hearing that coincides with and undergirds the interest of the abolitionists (black as well as white) who are the first to take a keen and strategic interest in—and who in a sense “discover”—black music as a font of meaning. The shift from noise to meaning is accomplished by the emergence of the pathos unleashed by nineteenth-century humanitarian reformism, out of which the antislavery movement developed. This mode of hearing elevates meaning over noise, but still retains traces of the latter within its schemas of inter-

pretation, an indication of the persistent legacy of the earlier orientations centered on noise, which revealed broader cultural strategies of racial distinctions. While both incidental and pathos-oriented modes of hearing allow listeners to express sympathy, it is the latter that carries this sensibility the farthest toward a modern transformation of interpretive modalities expressed by the reformist spirit of black and white abolitionists. They amplify and expand the modern ascription of subjectivity (which emerges first as a religious construct), champion the rhetorical as well as political energies to salvage and exonerate black subjects buried by slavery, and unleash the protoethnographic incursions into the cultural margins—all of which herald the coming of modern subject-centered cultural interpretation in the American context. All three modes of hearing bring some kind of interest and investment to the perception of black song making, and all are shaped by the social and institutional forces through which slavery and its aftermath operate.

Incidental and instrumental modes of hearing were the primary ways black music was comprehended and appropriated prior to the abolitionist movement. Yet, as we have noted, those who heard black soundings from within these frameworks often displayed an incipient desire to view slaves with some acknowledgement of their human qualities. By acknowledging human emotions, sensibilities, and feelings, overseers sometimes extended in their incidental and instrumental interpretations a reach toward an admission of a slave's nascent human subjectivity. Such admissions, however, remained only fleeting during much of the antebellum period.

By the mid-nineteenth century the interpretive framework shifted considerably in ways that not only enabled white observers to expand and showcase their sympathetic recognition of slaves as having deeper feelings, but also made it possible for them to link black meanings to black cultural expressions. This new framework was able to sustain the emerging interpretive orientations toward both black meanings and black cultural practices. By drawing upon the larger ideologies of romanticism, new interpreters began to fathom black meanings along with recognizing and acting upon their own newly acknowledged sympathy. That is, the emerging cultural interpreters began to recognize their own sympathetic consciousness as a moral virtue. As Charles Taylor suggests, the romantic reorientation toward the concept of a human inner goodness began to merge with a modern notion of "nature as an inner source"—finding this inner nature was tantamount to rediscovering and reclaiming one's spiritual authenticity. An individual attuned to the goodness of inner nature could follow "an inner voice or impulse" that led, in turn, to "the truth within us, and in particular our feelings—these were the crucial justifying

concepts of the Romantic rebellion in its various forms. They were indispensable to it.”³⁸

As we shall see, it was within this early modern protoethnographic framework that the new idea of *cultural practice* emerged as a domain worthy of attention and analysis.³⁹ Through the activities of culture the observer could get “inside” the heads of slaves and fathom their representations of, as well as their meanings and organized orientations toward, the world. This (posited) inner, hermeneutic world to be ascertained through pathos-oriented hearing, was precisely what was to be re-(dis)covered and interpretively retrieved by the critical abolitionists.

Noise and Deep Culture Revisited

The view of music making as noise is much more than an aesthetic orientation. The concept opens up music as a site of important societal tension. On this point, Jacques Attali provides us with a provocative thesis that is worth extending to the case of black music making under slavery. In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali attempts to reassess the function of music within the context of social change. Music, according to Attali, can function as socially disruptive noise. When it does, it carries the seeds of social transformation. As noise, music is socially disruptive because it makes “audible the new world that will gradually become visible” even to the established ways of seeing. In this capacity, music has the potential to “impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future.” This makes music “prophetic” in that it “explores much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code.”⁴⁰

This view of music as noise suggests that there are important links between music, society, and social change. It also requires that we shift our notions of music from viewing it as a predominantly emotional, aesthetic, leisurely, or technical domain to viewing it as a social site intersected by conflicting social interests. From this perspective music is not an autonomous essence or self-enclosed entity; it is never able to fully transcend or leave the social spheres out of which it is constitutively shaped. As culture, music is not a thing—it is a social field of relations that engender historically distinct forms through the continual interplay of social processes, practices, and productions. Music takes shape within social and institutional struggles.

Attali’s thesis of noise must be subjected to additional critical qualifications. Certainly not all music is noise. And music is not intrinsically pro-

phetic. A slave owner might celebrate his birthday with singing among his immediate family. Song in this context differs dramatically from that of the night woods, where slaves, presumably out of their master's earshot, commence to sing in their "hush arbors," and knowingly indulge in forbidden activity. Music becomes noise the more so when it unfolds upon, invokes, negotiates, and thus renders transparent social tensions.

As a cultural site music can foster the formation and expression of important sensibilities and even enable people to confront and negotiate the present and anticipate a future. Frederick Douglass's slave narrative, published a decade and a half before slavery was abolished, describes how the "songs of sorrow" carried out the subtle cultural work of slaves anticipating the overcoming of slavery. What enslaved singing subjects imaged, history managed to deliver. But while this example might qualify in Attali's perspective as a case of music's "prophetic" potential, I do not think that music is intrinsically prophetic. What music envisions carries no inexorable guarantees that any of its visions will be realized. Realization that turns desires into reality also involves politics. What we see by way of social desire is not necessarily what we get. The extent to which music can be called prophetic is actually a historical and empirical problem: music is prophetic only in post hoc accounts, by after-the-fact outcomes that appear to validate human desires and anticipation. In such cases it is not music but the social movements upon which music rides that matter. (How lyrical content and its particular meaning and spirit can be attributed to its makers is very important, but the quest for authorship and the notions of cultural authenticity that come with this quest tend to emphasize only one sociological slice. As the passages from Douglass's narrative indicate, song making under slavery is steeped in an already complex set of social relations that force upon music a host of cultural complications.) Nor would I endorse the idea that the problem of music and social transformation is best captured in whether or not the cultural content of music manages to "herald the future" by working its way into some kind of resolution true to its imagery. It is not music's "prophetic" capacities that warrant examination, but rather the complex processes by which social relations and social disruption are sounded and heard through music's noisiness.

Music nonetheless allows people to chart histories, to cast and recast recollections, to remember (as well as forget) the past; it helps anchor daily emotions from the simplest to the most anguishing and complex; it helps broker fears, anxieties, and notions of loss and threat just as it facilitates aspirations, hopes, dreams, and fantasies; it helps human beings mourn worlds gone by, probe worlds that trap, anticipate worlds not yet born. And if, in all of this, music happens to delight and enlighten, it can just as well be an obnoxious or even a frightening din for some. If music

can do all of this, then it does amount to a great source of psychic as well as cultural noise, for in a complex society, all of these functions invariably entail at some point conflicts with other groups. Attali's thesis highlights these problems. "Even when officially recognized, [music and musicians] are dangerous, disturbing, and subversive," and it is thus "impossible to separate their history from that of repression and surveillance."

However, the repression of music results not in its annihilation, but in its transmogrification. In the context of slavery, this meant the formation of symbolic alternatives, overcodings, semiotic masquerades, and the like, where music was permitted but always under a watchful eye. The complexities noted above resonate with much of what is known of black music under slavery in the United States. Considered from this framework, black music takes its place in the constellation of historically and socially embedded forms. Attempts to reduce it to an essential domain of identity (e.g., "black music" as a thing in itself) untouched and uncontaminated by the larger forces of history become problematic. Such endeavors are fruitful in generating political solidarities; strategic self and group definitions help not only define membership, but engender among members a sense of social boundaries fundamental to a sense of autonomy and authenticity. But such well intentioned reductionism transforms identity from a constitutive practice into a font of essential origins. The resulting identity takes shape through, while eclipsing from view, the field of social relations that tie such domains of cultural life to a much wider network of social and historical forces. In understanding the initial framework of black music as noise, the entire problem of the production of culture in general, and the production of black music in particular, takes on a new social complexity. As a social construct, the framework of music as noise restores our critical grasp of the connections between cultural practices and social struggles. It is this cultural complexity that needs to be grasped.

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Hearing black music as noise continued well into the nineteenth century (and arguably much longer, even to the present), but it was not the predominant orientation.⁴¹ The managerial strategies to control and use black noise were renegotiated in important ways in the early-nineteenth century, and along lines of complex compromises with black musical producers. Slaves made use of opportunities to indulge in collective forms of expression that arose from the sheer psychic struggle for a sense of place and the need for cognitive maps to show them how to survive and negotiate everyday life. Through proselytization slaves were given religious instruction and were allowed to practice Christianity under the watchful

eyes of overseers. These privileges amounted to being given a *religious franchise*—the granting by clergy in the dominant culture of an opportunity for slaves, who were deemed to have teachable and savable souls, and were thus eligible to have limited membership as subjects with the larger ideology of Christian thought. This franchise was not uniformly accepted or respected, and differed greatly across the various Protestant denominations. Though policed, black religion flourished, and in the process slaves gained relative cultural autonomy. This helped slaves expand and amplify their collective strategies. How this process worked will be discussed below. Slaves gained and cultivated cultural ground by extending their music making and enlarging a distinctly black musical public sphere. This sphere, too, became a recognizable dimension of American cultural life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Still another line of development came as the preempathic notion of noise was progressively outgrown by the abolitionist's new emphasis on the cultural expressions of slaves. As we shall see, the interpretive assistance provided by black abolitionists was crucial. The narratives written by former slaves provided early field maps that guided white sympathizers into the hitherto mysterious and noisy domain of black culture. The older orientation toward black soundings as meaningless noise did not lose its grip, but it was challenged on the margins by the new white cultural workers who detested slavery. Their feelings of relative disenchantment with modernity and market society enabled them to begin to explore what black sounds might actually mean to slaves. The results of this hermeneutic turn toward black expression, regardless of whether or not white listeners ever actually "understood" black vernaculars with a comprehension equal to the slave's own consciousness, is of course open to debate. My concern is with the formation of the new forms of knowledge that were shaped in this very cultural conjuncture. The hermeneutic turn championed by the new reflexivity of both black and white observers opened the doors to the increasingly recognized appreciation and study of "black culture" and paved the way for protoethnographic probes into American subcultures. It is to these important developments that I now turn.