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African Influence on the Art of the United States

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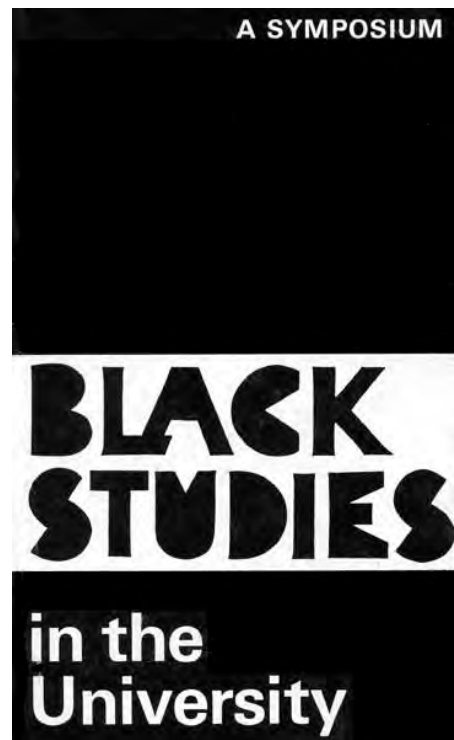


March 2010 Newsletter

African Influence on the Art of the United States

By Robert Farris Thompson*

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BLACK STUDIES IN THE UNIVERSITY

A SYMPOSIUM

edited by

ARMSTEAD L. ROBINSON

CRAIG C. FOSTER

DONALD H. OGILVIE

Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1969



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AFRICAN INFLUENCE ON THE ART OF THE UNITED STATES

Robert Farris Thompson

African-influenced art in the United States attests the cultural vitality of the Afro-American. Recent research has discovered a wealth of continuities in the Deep South, from wood sculpture and basketry to ceramic sculptured forms in which Western types become the basis for patterns of iconic intensity possibly derived from the Congo-Angola section of Africa. The assumption has been that slavery in the United States destroyed the creative memories of newly arrived Africans, so that today no African influence can be discerned in this country, apart from fragments in the verbal arts, music, and the dance. The more extreme view holds that no form of African influence whatsoever remains. The literature on African-influenced art in the United States is consequently sparse (few are likely to study a field believed not to exist) and is embedded in larger controversy about the relative strength of African-influenced custom in this country.

James A. Porter (1943: 13-28) described the contribution of African slave artisans to American folk art. Later, he rethought their achievement in terms of subsaharan retentions. Porter detected, without going into detail, "unmistakable signs of African recollection in peculiarities of surface design" characterizing effigy vessels made in stoneware by men of African descent in South Carolina

NOTE: This lecture at the symposium was illustrated by about 125 lantern slides, a thirty-minute film on the use of sculpture in dance context in West African art, and demonstrations of praise drumming. It has not proved practical to reproduce any of these illustrations here, and I have revised my lecture accordingly. The reader who is interested will find the entire thesis intact in a forthcoming volume entitled *African and Afro-American Art: The Transatlantic Tradition*, to be published by New York Graphic.

(1966: 6). More typical is the view of Cedric Dover (1960: 18), who found that:

Africanism is rare even in American Negro woodcraft, though the material itself facilitates the continuity of decorative treatment from one generation to another—the walking stick carved in 1863 by Henry Gudgell, a slave in Missouri, is the only example we have been able to find from the continental United States. The interesting pottery to which Mr. Porter refers is no more than the descriptive phrase “slave pottery” implies. Its purposes, inspiration, and making are wholly American.

Dover is not convincing because he does not reason the function, sources, or meaning of the Afro-Carolinian vessels, nor does he juxtapose examples in order to prove, on the comparative basis, the process by which Anglo-American forms in Afro-American hands remain Anglo-American. He takes the self-limiting term, “slave pottery,” assuredly invented by Anglo-Americans and not the makers of the objects, to serve an argument about nonexistence of African influence. Art will not be judged, however, in terms of racist verbalisms. Unfortunately, the writings of men who make up their minds before they initiate research into African continuities in this country influence our thinking about Afro-American art to this day.

There is another kind of scholarship that has a bearing on the problem. Here one studies the differences between the condition of slavery in North and South America, whose relevance to the formation of United States Afro-American art can be well imagined. To begin with, circumstances favoring self-assertion in terms of ideology and leadership were perhaps stronger in Brazil and the Caribbean than in the United States, for, as Eugene Genovese (1966) tells us, the cultivation of sugar in Latin American plantations led to the formation of work forces averaging two hundred slaves, directed by a relatively small population of Ibero-Americans. Thus there was less pressure against the sustaining of much of African culture and the tendency to lose identity was not severe. In the United States half of the slaves lived in units of twenty or less and most others in groups of fifty or less. The slaves were lost in a hostile white sea. Death

awaited outside the plantation where the “cracker” (rural racist) farmers without slaves were plentiful, armed, and in complete sympathy with the policies of the great landholders.

The capacity to form independent states within states, composed of escape slaves, existed only where the state apparatus was weak and the proximity of empty tropical forest assured a haven under familiar African-like conditions of climate and ecology. An environment of total hostility in North America meant that development of the arts comparable to those of separate African-influenced states, founded by runaway slaves, such as the great carving styles of the Saramacca, Djuka, and Boni peoples in Dutch Surinam on the north coast of South America was well-nigh impossible.

The social organizations under the Catholic Church to which the Afro-Cuban slave might belong, for another example of a difference between slave experiences, simply did not exist in Protestant Virginia, so that there were no fraternal brotherhoods, no special holidays save Christmas, and no great street processions brightened by displays of African-derived costume, sculpture, and the dance (cf. Klein, 1967: 120) Early St. Louis under the Spaniards might have been an exception to the point, for at least we know that Africans and other American-born slaves there were painting their bodies and adorning themselves with feathers in highly visible dancing. But even here the Spanish Lt.-Governor saw fit, on August 15, 1781, to forbid “all savages, whether free or slave, and all Negroes of this said post to clothe themselves in any other manner than according to our own usage and custom” (Houck, 1909, I: 245).

The most important enemy of African cultural tradition was racism. Artistic autonomy implies social autonomy. The suppression of all customs which did not confirm the dominance of the Westerner were more vigorously prosecuted in the British colonies than elsewhere in the New World, according to Roger Abrahams. Here the rationale was the notion of inherent superiority over “dark peoples,” a conviction perhaps dating from the contact of the Anglo-Saxon with the Celt (Abrahams, 1967: 459).

Distinctions between North and South American experiences of slavery do not exhaust the nature of the problem. A given set of known cultural factors does not imply the whole. Nevertheless,

many writers, modern or otherwise, guided by these facts or for reasons of their own, have asserted by fiat zero continuity of African traditions in the United States. Silberman (1964: 109) is typical: "In contrast to European immigrants who brought rich cultures and long histories with them, the Negro has been completely stripped of his past and severed from any culture save that of the United States." More serious is the theoretical account of Stanley Elkins, who in his influential *Slavery: a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1963: 101) describes "what happens" to the African culture of the arriving slave in the United States:

Much of his past had been annihilated; nearly every prior connection had been severed. Not that he had really "forgotten" all these things—his family and kinship arrangements, his language, the tribal religion, the taboos, the name he had once borne, and so on—but none of it any longer carried much meaning . . . Where then was he to look for new standards, new cues—who would furnish them now? He could now look to none but his master.

Certainly it is true, probably, that North American slavery obliterated African patterns of political structure, economy, and familial institutions, but it is altogether wrong to extrapolate from known vicissitudes a total erasure of the past.

Research without prejudicing the case presents a more positive assessment. Musicology seems a more reliable index to the developments within the social life of the slaves, where they asserted their common humanity, than the deliberations of Elkins and kindred spirits. Here one learns that the basic structural traits which define West Africa as a province in World music (dominance of a percussive concept of music, off-beat phrasing of melodic accents, overlapping of vocal and instrumental patterns of call-and-response, and so forth) reappear in United States Afro-American musical forms such as the work song and the ring shout (Waterman, 1952: 211-18). These musical continuities are so visible and massive that they cannot by any stretch of the imagination be characterized as esoteric or circumstantial, and they demolish by virtue of existence the new myth of

the disappearance of the Afro-American's past in the United States. Indeed, from the further development of the work song and the ring shout have arisen the basic café musics of the world in the twentieth century. The triumph of jazz and the blues indicates that something is wrong somewhere with the theory of slaves rejecting their meaningless past for the cultural standards of their master. This does not mean that there was no borrowing from Western music and other cultural forms, but jazz and the blues do not sound like weakened European folk music precisely because their innovators respected African traditions of timing, timbre, and so forth, which had not in the least been forgotten or jettisoned.

Then, too, it must be said that fresh research into the nature of differential slave status in the Americas tends to indicate that the experience of the Afro-American, whether in North or South America or the Caribbean, was not all that different in terms of debasement. Mintz (1961: 581) contests the notion of Latin American slavery as a single historical phenomenon. And Sio (1968: 327), in his interesting criticism of prior assumptions, cites Mintz' point that Cuban slavery "dehumanized the slave as viciously as had Jamaican or Northern America slavery" and Boxer's assertion that the widely accepted "belief that the Brazilian was an exceptionally kind master is applicable only to nineteenth-century slavery under the Empire, and not to the colonial period." Sio concludes that many more similarities existed between United States and Latin American slavery than were previously suspected.

If this is so, then the facile assumption of total disappearance of African custom in the United States might well be rethought. The notion that only generic continuities are possible in the necessarily more vicious social climate of North America has to be seriously modified, too, for if both North and South America were a kind of living hell for Afro-Americans, and Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians managed to assert ethnicity, then it has to be considered whether specific or nearly specific continuities were not possible in the United States as well.

Art provides a possible avenue for the testing of these theories. The suppression of the more public African influences, such as religious ritual and the use of subsaharan costume, did not still the voice

of more intimate expressions. Present to this day are African-influenced verbal arts (Aunt Nancy tales), healing (conjuring), cuisine (hog maws and collard greens), singing (field hollers and work songs), and dance forms in considerable quantity. And present, too, are parallel visual continuities: amazing stoneware vessels shaped in the form of anguished human faces made by Afro-Americans in South Carolina in the last century, multiple wood carving modes in tidewater Georgia, basketry modes of astonishing purity near Charleston, the deliberate decoration of graves in the African manner with surface deposits of broken earthenware and possessions in many parts of the Deep South, and isolated instances of Afro-American wood carving in Livingston County, Missouri, and Onondaga County, New York. If these visual traditions are less blatant than the programs of costuming, sculpture, and the dance with which Afro-Cubans used to bring their street fiestas to proper aesthetic pitch, they are no less valid for this difference. By the hand of individual Afro-American masters were fashioned works of art whose blending of remembered ancestral and encountered alien modes may now be estimated and explored.

Livingston County, Missouri

A striking example of what may be designated Afro-Missourian art is a walking stick carved by the Afro-American blacksmith, Henry Gudgell, in Livingston County some fifty miles northeast of Kansas City.

Henry Gudgell was born a slave in 1826 in Kentucky. Census records of 1880 at the Missouri State Historical Society at Columbia indicate that the father of Gudgell was born in Tennessee and his mother in Kentucky. His father was an Anglo-American and his mother a slave. The mother trekked on foot with her child, it is said, from Kentucky to Missouri with some of the slaves of what was to become the Spence Gudgell farm when the Anglo-American Gudgells came to the area at some point before 27 December 1867, when the name of Spence Gudgell appears for the first time in the records of the Livingston County Recorder's Office. Thus Henry Gudgell and his mother were from Kentucky, a state which in 1793 had absorbed large numbers of slaves from coastal America (Jordan, 1969: 320).

Accessible information does not permit the reconstitution of the world of the sculptor's childhood in Kentucky, nor the kinds of coastally derived aspects of African-influenced culture he may have experienced.

It is remembered that Gudgell was "fair"—i.e. a mulatto—and that not only was he a blacksmith and wheelwright of note but also a master of coppersmithing and silversmithing. Henry Gudgell made rings out of melted-down coins, a method not unlike that of the Navajo of New Mexico. He embellished these rings with minute geometric chasing and taught the craft to his son, Edmund. A surviving daughter of a slave who belonged to the Gudgells told the writer in November 1968 that she owned a plain silver ring adorned with the single figure of a heart, made from a dime piece by either Henry or Edmund Gudgell. Local testimony makes clear that Henry Gudgell was skilled in many crafts.

The magnificently embellished walking stick, first illustrated by James Porter in 1943, is still the only example of his wood sculpture known to survive. The making of the object intersects with an early battle of the Civil War. On August 10, 1861, a native of Livingston County who knew the Spence Gudgells, John Bryan, was wounded in the knee at the Battle of Wilson's Creek while serving in the First Missouri Cavalry of General Sterling Price's Confederate Army. Bryan sustained a limp for the rest of his life as a result of the wound. After the return of Bryan to Livingston County, Henry Gudgell carved the walking stick to compensate the infirmity of the friend of his master. The grandson of Bryan recalled in 1940 for the *Index of American Design* that the cane was carved in 1863, but the writer thinks it is more likely that the work was completed after the establishment of the Gudgell farm in 1867. John Bryan was proud of the cane and used it until his death in March 1899. The object then became the property of his son, Alfonso Albury Bryan, then of his grandson, John Albury Bryan, an architect in St. Louis, who sold the cane to the Yale University Art Gallery in March 1968.

This single piece of Henry Gudgell's wood sculpture exhibits skilled craftsmanship in the combination of abstract and figural motifs and seems imbued with the aesthetic precision characteristic of a silversmith. The handle is powerfully grooved with serpentine flutings.

ing. Immediately below follow a band of plain surface, a band of truncated fluting, more flat surface, two encircling rings, a circle of diamond-form pattern, and two final circular bands. Diminishment of motif artfully registers the tapering of the staff.

The decorative order then changes, from the circular geometric to the naturalistic representation of spaced, small figures. At the top appear a lizard and a tortoise, both carved as if seen from above. The figure of a man appears below. He is dressed in shirt, trousers, and shoes. His knees are bent and the arms are extended as if the figure were embracing the shaft of the cane. On the opposite side of the cane below the hands of the human figure is a bent branch from which sprouts a single veined leaf. The fork of the branch mirrors the bending of the knees of the human figure. The lower register of the cane is embellished with an entwined serpent, an echo of the serpentine coil of the handle. The entire staff was once entirely blackened but the color of the unfinished wood has broken through at the edges of the lizard and the tortoise, and the fluted handle has been rubbed bare by use.

Comparison of the cane with a chiefly staff from Woyo territory in the Bakongo cluster of people in West Africa elicits interesting similarities: human figure with bent legs, reptiles carved as if seen from above, entwined serpent motif. Functionally, the Woyo staff is a light scepter whereas the Missourian object is a working cane with marks of heavy use at the tip. Motifs are similar but their placement differs. Function guided the distinction, the ruler gripping the scepter at the entwined serpent, the Missourian at the entwined handle.

Each motif on the Gudgell cane shines with virtual metallic smoothness. The tortoise, for example, is like a fugitive from some forms of West African jewelry. And there may be an extension of the craft of the decoration of rings in the form of the fluting and diamond-shaped patterning which encircle the upper part of the cane, for both the making of rings and the carving of cane handles consider the problem of enlivening a continuously curved surface.

On July 16, 1870, Spence Gudgell, the former master of the sculptor, sold him twenty-two acres of land, carved out of the original one hundred and sixty acres which the Anglo-American had purchased in 1867 (Book 28, Livingston County Recorder: 188; Book

33: 145). Thus for the last twenty-five years of his life the craftsman was a landholder. He died in 1895 and is buried in the Utica, Missouri, cemetery.

In a sense, Afro-Missourian sculpture at Livingston County died with him. Afro-American canes have been recently found in this portion of Missouri—three attributed to the twentieth-century craftsman George Ballinger of Carlo, Missouri, have motifs vaguely reminiscent of West Africa—but none show the strength or the authority of the master. More research needs to be done on the origins of the style of Henry Gudgell, so that the links between the coastal work of Afro-Georgian sculptors, whose canes, embellished with reptile and human figures, are similar to the Missouri work, and the inland carver may be determined and analyzed together with elements of Western influence, the canon of proportion characterizing the human figure on the side of the cane, his dress, and the shape and conception of the veined leaf.

South Carolina

This state preserves a tradition of ash-glazed stoneware vessels shaped in the form of a tormented human face. These works are attributed to Afro-American craftsmen. A single example introduces the field, where formal quality is largely determined by the degree of imaginative transformation of gross ceramic structure into human expression.

The object at hand is glazed olive-grey. The eyes and bared teeth are rendered in another medium—kaolin (porcelain clay)—so that the image presents a startling contrast in color and texture. The vessel is small, about four inches high. The structural elements are quickly told: the spout is set centrally at the top and is grooved twice; a short oval section handle rises out of the bottom of the spout, at the back of the object, and curves down to end at the widest portion of the vessel.

The eyes project intensity. They are fashioned separately, as balls of kaolin, then set in rounded sockets, surrounded by oval rims overlaid with glaze, then fired together with the vessel. Their stare is striking because they have been placed slightly to each side of the face and have not been frontally sited. The eyebrows form high

curves. The inner point of each eyebrow joins the line of the nose. The nose itself is narrow and has pinched nostrils. The nose is set high above the mouth. The open mouth reveals the clenched kaolin teeth. Lower teeth are larger than upper, suggesting bestial ferocity. Part of the upper lip seems taut and part of the upper lip seems relaxed. There is no chin, and the head seems cut off at the neck. The sculpture is a marvel of coherent expression: protrusion by protrusion, white against olive, smoothness against grain.

There are two further known examples by the same hand, one in the Smithsonian Institution, the other in the John Gordon Collection in New York City. These show virtually identical concentration of power within diminutive mass and shaping of the human face as a terrible force, like a skull partially revealed. The artist has taken spectacular advantage of the fact that kaolin remains white when it burns.

Shortly before the Second World War, William Raiford Eve of Augusta, Georgia, put together a collection of related jugs and cups, the fruit of several field trips to the Afro-American settlements between Aiken and Langley, South Carolina. On the basis of this collection and other pieces, such as the example I have described, which have been independently attributed to what is now Aiken County in South Carolina, it is possible to suggest a regional tradition based on the use of mixed sand and pine ash glaze, most frequently olive green or brown, ball-like eyes rendered in kaolin, with or without dotted pupil, and sometimes movable within their sockets; bared teeth in kaolin, occasionally indicated with diagonal strokes; and long noses with flaring nostrils, drooping at the tip, and slightly hooked in profile.

These vessels have been attributed in local traditions to the pottery of the plantation of Colonel Thomas Jones Davies (1830-1902) at Bath, in the western portion of the county of Aiken. Colonel Davies founded the Palmetto Firebrick Works in 1862 during the Civil War. On a field trip in January 1969 the writer found the ledger of Colonel Davies, kept by a surviving daughter of a second marriage, at Augusta, Georgia, and the first entry appears to be February 22, 1862.

The important fact is that the men who made the pottery at Bath

were mostly Afro-American. It is documented that in 1863 a mounting wartime demand for crockery caused Davies to direct his Afro-American potters to fashion earthen jars, pitchers, cups, and saucers, using the simple kickwheel, which has a treadle with a crank. When the historian of American ceramics, Barber, viewed their work about forty years later he found the vessels “crude and of primitive shape” (in reaction to non-Western notions of approximate, as opposed to absolute, measurement?) but he did admire their strength. Barber, furthermore, found that the body of the pottery was composed of three-fourths to five-sixths of kaolin and alluvial earth from the Savannah River, which is six miles distant from Bath. This composition created a hard body which partially vitrified with a mixture of sand and pine ashes to obtain an excellent glaze.

The story goes that by 1863 the slaves suddenly were fashioning on their own initiative small vessels with human faces on them and bringing these works to the Davies pottery to be fired. All operations were suspended by the end of the Confederacy and the pottery never reopened. One source maintains that the men of the army of General Tecumseh Sherman set fire to the enterprise in 1865. In effect, we are told by local tradition that the slaves dreamed up these striking sculptures within two years, then disappeared.

To accept this uncritically is impossible. Important artistic events do not emerge without historical basis. Kaolin deposits had been known to exist in the hills between Augusta and Aiken since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, and when the Afro-American craftsmen took this substance and fashioned with it eyes and teeth and set them into the firebrick-like body of their sculptures to be fired they had, as far as can be determined, created an artistic concept for which there is no precedent in the history of Western ceramics. The importance of their contribution forces a rethinking of the history of United States pottery.

The argument for the use of Afro-American artisans in South Carolina was originally scarcity of labor. The entire province in 1731 had only one potter (Stavisky, 1948-9: 317). As potteries opened in South Carolina during the next hundred and fifty years, the use of Afro-American labor had become common. In 1796 a certain Mr. Landrum established a pottery industry near Edgefield, some fifteen

miles north of what is now Aiken County, itself carved out of a larger geographic entity about 1872. There was also an active and important pottery at Lewis Miles Mill, between Trenton and Vaulcluse, near Aiken, from about 1837 to 1894 (Webb, 1968: personal communications). Thus there was continuous pottery-making industry in the kaolin-rich Aiken area during most of the last century.

The most important fact remains that many of the potters of the region were of African descent. It must be made clear that at least three different hands can be detected in the corpus of face vessels attributed to Afro-Americans—"The Master of the Davies Pottery," "The Master of the Diagonal Teeth," "The Master of the Louis Miles Pottery"—and that a number of Afro-American potters, who gained recognition for their work and whose names are known, may soon be linked to these modes.

The most interesting of the documented Afro-American potters was a man known only as "Dave." He worked at the Miles Mill pottery and is said to have died about 1860 at the estimated age of eighty-three. Four extant works are attributed to Dave. Three are in the Charleston Museum, one in the South Caroliniana Library at Columbia. Dave is noted for having his work inscribed with rhymed couplets. One such inscription, on a glazed crock (Charleston Museum 29.255.1), establishes a cryptic sense of humour and the slave status of the maker:

Dave belongs to Mr. Miles
Where the oven bakes and the pot biles

Also inscribed is the date: July 31, 1840. On an impressive olive-glazed salt meat or lard jar which he made and which is now at Charleston we find the date May 13, 1859, and the inscription, "Dave & Baddler/ Great and Noble Jar/ Hold Sheep, Goat, or Bear." An identical vessel, also at the Charleston Museum, has the same date but a different couplet about the making of the object at Stoney Bluff, "for making [illegible] enuff." Archival material at the South Caroliniana Library indicates that, on a now missing jar, Dave repeats the verse about the "great and noble jar," and another document of a vanished pot seems to shed light on the effaced

Charleston inscription: "Made at Stoney Bluff/ For Making [Lard] Enuff." Like the stanza-shifting Afro-American singers of the nineteenth-century South Carolinian spiritual, who sang stanzas of one song in another (Davis, 1914: 250), Dave chose for reasons of his own to place the same rhyme on more than one vessel. The short rhymed statements attest his wit and recall the sparing style of the three-line blues. Here is an Afro-American potter who distinguished himself during a career of more than nineteen years and who was active until very shortly before his death.

A second Afro-Carolinian ceramist was Jack Thurman, who also belonged to Louis Miles. Thurman allegedly died about 1908 at the age of eighty-four. A certain George Flesher, who worked at the Miles Mill pottery during the last years of its operation and who consequently was in a position to provide firsthand information about the wares of the pottery and the men who made them, recalled for a Charleston Museum archivist in the summer of 1930 the dignity of Jack Thurman, his impressive physique, and his gift as a raconteur. Flesher attributed two vessels in the Charleston Museum (29.271.21; 29.255.3) to the hand of Thurman. Most interesting is the recollection that Thurman not only worked at Miles Mill but also at one of the two Landrum potteries in the Aiken area, suggesting a measure of exchange in Afro-American labor and furnishing a clue to the unity of the Aiken County style range.

A third Carolina potter of African descent was a slave named Jim Lee. Lee worked at the pottery of Roundtree and Bodie, near Ninety-Six, in what is now Greenwood County (Charleston Museum *Bulletin*, October-November 1920: 52). One of his works, in the Charleston Museum, is known: a remarkable olive-glazed figure of an Anglo-American with pear-shaped head. The figure wears a jacket with front facing turned back to reveal the elegant buttons of his shirt. The hair, moustache, and jacket-facing of the figure are charcoal black. The back facing of the figure's garment is turned up at the right shoulder, giving a mildly dishevelled appearance. It is said that the image was a satiric likeness (but the writer thinks that the features seem generic) of a certain Reverend Pickett. The version fits the fact of the anomalous flapping up of part of the garment of the subject. It is said that Jim Lee made this sculpture "before 1860."

Thus four nineteenth-century Afro-Carolinian potters are known, assuming that "Baddler" was also of African descent, for it does not seem likely that an Anglo-American potter would have taken second billing to a slave.

The face vessels made at the Miles Mill pottery were Afro-American works, as attested by Charleston Museum documentation (6448; 18029). The finest of these holdings is a superbly glazed brown face vessel with elegant features and a haunting luminosity. Another is contrastingly crude and is dated to 1880, some fourteen years before the closing of the Louis Miles pottery.

The diffusion of the genre through Anglo-Saxon mimesis and Afro-American migration assured a certain continuity. The Smithsonian Institution has an interesting work by the Anglo-American potter Cheaver Meaders, who worked in the northeast corner of the state of Georgia, at Cleveland, until his death in 1967 at the age of eighty. Meaders made dark brown ash-glazed stoneware face jugs, among other ceramic types (Watkins, 1969: personal communication). He made eyes and teeth by inserting broken pieces of yellow glazed earthenware into the body of the stoneware, in evident imitation of the kaolin of the South Carolinian mode. He substituted the sharper glitter of fragmented crockery (Smithsonian 65. 192). He seems to mistake the artistic distortions of Afro-Carolinian for license, in the manner of rock-and-roll mistranslations of the blues. Finally, Herbert Hemphill, of the Museum of American Folk Arts, reports that an Afro-American living near Mobile was making stoneware sculpture in the Afro-Carolinian manner as late as the decade preceding World War II.

Thus the traditional account of a sudden burst of Afro-American creativity at the Davies Plantation is subsumed under a larger and more important history of individual Afro-American achievement. The broader reality of the Aiken County ceramic history also reveals the inadequacy of traditional forms of nomenclature applied to these face vessels. They are often called "monkey jugs," after an old designation for water cooler (Stow, 1932). Afro-Carolinians used to refer to the heat of the day in phrases like "monkey almost got me today," and Albert E. Sanders, curator of natural sciences at the Charleston Museum, recalls having heard similar expressions during

his childhood at Columbia, South Carolina, used in the sense of heat prostration. But we have seen that the most visually intense of the face vessels are not more than four inches high and would not have been practical as containers of water for thirsty field hands. At some point, the writer suspects, a term for larger utilitarian stoneware water jugs was loosely applied to all face vessels and the imprecise designation acquired an inertia of its own.

An improper title can contribute to a lack of critical thought about artistic form. Afro-Carolinian face vessels are called "water jugs," "grotesque jugs," "slave jugs," "plantation jugs," and even, in one isolated instance, "voodoo pots." None of these terms suggest artistic viability. In addition, while many vessels are true jugs, many face cups and face jars are not, hence as a general designation the notion of the jug is not applicable. It might be useful to jettison, once and for all, all forms of past terminology and introduce the fresh term, Afro-Carolinian face vessels, first of all to honor the African descent of the makers, secondly to single out the province where the finest works were made, thirdly to allude to the inventive fusion of physiognomy and ceramic structure which characterizes the genre, and fourthly to suggest the extension of the tradition across a universe of ceramic forms, of which the jug is but one type.

However we title them, these sculptures are still considered craft curiosities, not works of art. The indifferent quality of many examples, many of these made by Anglo-American imitators, seem to have colored the impression of an entire field. One authority on "material culture," struck by the use of Western glaze and what he thinks is an obvious citation of the Toby Jug tradition of England, has written off altogether the possibility of African influence at the same time that he consigns the works to the nether regions of folk art limbo. But one does not judge Memling on the basis of Flemish daubers. The finest of the Afro-Carolinian ceramics are complex solutions of problems of form, quality, and meaning, and when the culture of the men who made them is remembered, it becomes dangerous to ignore the possibility of African cultural impulses reinstated in these works.

The main problem of analysis is the separation of the Western from the African elements. First of all, the Afro-American potters

were working within a Western technical tradition of ash-glazed stoneware, which was common in Anglo-American potteries from the Carolinas to Florida. Stoneware vitrifies at the temperature of about 2200° to 2300° fahrenheit, and the ash glaze is a high-temperature glaze especially suited to the medium. The glaze, C. Malcolm Watkins (personal communication) has kindly informed the writer, is not colored when it is applied nor does it achieve its usual olive-green color by itself. Under normal firing conditions it combines chemically with the clay to produce the characteristic olive color. This color is recurrent on utilitarian stoneware from any number of potteries in the South. The same clay and the same glaze, with only slightly changed degrees of firing conditions, may produce a brown or some other color. It is therefore impossible to base an attribution upon color alone, nor can one impute intention to shifts in chromatic effect. A brown pot and a green pot, Watkins explains, both of the same clay and glaze and made by the same potter, could come out of the same kiln in the same firing. Hard-to-control wood-fired kilns prevailed in the South in the nineteenth century, and a change in the wind or the weather could literally create a variety of colors.

Secondly, the basic pottery shapes and the use of the wheel as means of production were imposed upon the Afro-American potters and show no sign of African influence; hand-modeling and the molding of hemispherical bowls upon upturned pot-bottoms are techniques employed along the Guinea Coast (Drost, 1967: 256). The dominant Western influences are therefore the use of the glaze, the wheel, and the basic structure, the jug, jar, or cup, all with oval-section handle.

The notion of embellishing such vessels with a human face might have come from Europe, but African precedents, especially at the mouth of the Congo can also be cited. Some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German Bellarmine jugs have a rectangle framing a face, shaped in a mold and applied to the vessel. But the Afro-Carolinian faces are hand modeled, especially the eyes and teeth, and the concept of the face as an isolated framed unit of decoration is foreign to the Carolinian spontaneous humanizing of the entire frontal mass of the vessel. We may therefore safely ignore a Bellar-

mine excavated on the Bull Plantation near Sheldon as having nothing in common with the indigenous aesthetic. Bellarmine probably did not, after all, occur in sight of the slave potters.

Much more serious as a possible source is the English Toby Jug, essentially a hollow china figure seated on a low seat. The first examples are attributed to Ralph Wood (1716-72) of Burslem. The Toby Jug traditionally represents a short, corpulent, grinning man who wears a deep-pocketed coat with large buttons and wide cuffs, as well as a tricorne hat (Hansen, ed. 1968: 64). The description recalls somewhat the "satirized minister" by Jim Lee and suggests that a modicum of English influence may have guided the hand of this particular potter. But Lee was outside the circle of Aiken County potters. Even closer, at first sight, to the Aiken County face vessels was a variant on the Toby mode, a face occupying the entire front of a jug. Pottery was one of the free-thinking areas of late eighteenth-century English art and there were many interesting face pitchers made at this time (McNab, 1969: personal communication). However, the face jugs and face pitchers of the English have a characteristic buttery sheen and naturalistic detail, which are alien to the iconic intensity of the best of the Afro-Carolinian.

We must remember that there are at least three men working in the Aiken County tradition and that each man doubtless resolves the conflict between the wheel-turned technique which he was given and his own plastic sources of inspiration in different ways. Jim Lee, working north of the county, seems to have moved in a direction perceptively closer to Western propriety, but it is difficult to say, so paltry is relevant information about him. But the Aiken County masters created a face from which the eyes protrude and the teeth flash in a manner light years removed from the courtly Toby Jug.

The white clay eyes and teeth, set against the glaze, make the finest Afro-Carolinian face vessels appear to roar where works three times their size merely whisper. There is nothing in Europe remotely like them, for the use of kaolin inserts into the body of the pottery seems peculiar to the Afro-Carolinian and his imitators. One may object: but are there glazed kaolin eyes and teeth in African pottery? The answer is no, but this is not the point. The point is that kaolin has been used here in a manner which strongly recalls the

insertion of white cowrie shells, white glittering pieces of mirror, or white strips of tin, or glass backed with white, to represent the eyes against the darker medium of wood in a wide variety of West African societies. The use of multiple media in figural sculpture—brass on wood, mirror insets in the eyes, cowrie shell insets to denote the eyes and mouth, buttons to denote the eyes, application of brass studs or iron nails to denote the pupil of the eye, the use of beads to mark the eyes within a face carved of wood; the recital of usages is potentially endless—is one of the important traits of West African sculpture as a cultural entity. Until evidence of similar mixing of the white medium of kaolin with darker glazed pottery can be proved in pre-Civil War pottery from Europe, it is surely more logical to suggest the influence of this basic West African tendency. The glaze and the gross shape of the Afro-Carolinian vessels have distracted the lay observer from the expressionist nuances of their modeling. The modeling of the faces finds much in common with Bakongo figural sculpture in wood.

Compare, as illustrations, examples of a variety of wood figures from this area of West Africa. The same pinpoint pupils within white eyes (white behind glass in lieu of kaolin), the same long hooked nose, the same siting of the nose at a point relatively high above the lips, the same open mouth with bared teeth, and the same widening of the mouth so that it extends across the width of the jaw, are highly suggestive similarities. It would be unwise in the absence of data about the ancestors of the Afro-Carolinian potters to press this comparison too far, but it is certainly true that no Western jar or pitcher known to the writer shows such striking kinship.

South Carolina is a state where artistic transmission from tropical Africa has been firmly established. The woven baskets and trays fashioned by Afro-Carolinian women between Mt. Pleasant and Sullivan's Island, across the harbor from Charleston, and elsewhere in the state, are made with the coiling technique of West Africa and the method of decoration, albeit achieved with available American materials—viz. marsh grass for the body of the basket, palmetto leaves for the binding, and the long-leaved pine for a decorative band of brown—seems decidedly African (Sturtevant, 1959; Chase, n.d.: 2) Some of these baskets have been convincingly related to virtually identical

Senegambian wares by Judith Wragg Chase in an exhibit mounted at Charleston and visually cited by the Afro-American installation of the Hall of Africa exhibition, which opened in June 1968, at the American Museum of Natural History. It is strange that no one has criticized the cultural legitimacy of the “Gullah baskets” on account of the use of the needles of the American long-leafed pine as an element of decoration, while the use of glaze and the wheel seems to suffice to discredit any possibility of African influence upon South Carolinian stoneware.

The stylistic closeness of the Afro-Carolinian baskets to Senegambia makes sense in the light of slaving history, for the third largest quantity of Africans brought to South Carolina during the period 1752-1808 (12,441 out of a total of 65,466 African slaves) were from “Gambia to Sierra Leone” (Donnan, 1935: Vol. IV, pp. 278ff.). The overwhelming incursion was Congo-Angolan, however, for when the figures from these two adjacent areas of Africa are added together, it is clear that the sum—22,409—is almost double the Senegambian.

The fact that men and women of African descent in tidewater South Carolina are called Gullahs, and this word is supposed to derive from Angola, and the fact that the most convincing of the Africanisms detected in Gullah dialect by Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949) are, in the opinion of the writer, those of Congo and Angolan origin, make one rethink the notion that Anglo-Saxon America was normally correlated with an incursion of Ashanti slaves and hence Ashanti survivals.

Comparison of the Afro-Carolinian ceramic with the hushed, dignified heads of rulers in the funerary terracotta tradition of the Akan is more in the nature of a confrontation, for the harsh tenor of the American genre is far removed from the composure which the Akan noble heads evince. On the other hand, the moment the vessels are compared to the open-mouthed, bared-teeth, glassy-eyed figures of the Bakongo visual tradition, correspondences leap to life before the eyes of the observer. It is worth noting, in addition, that not only does the Ki-Kongo word for smoking pipe survive in South Carolina (Turner: 199) but Judith Wragg Chase has documented a clay smoking pipe with raised designs that was found under a slave

cabin in South Carolina bearing comparison with the clay smoking pipes of the Congo-Angolan region and their apparent descendants among the Congo-Angola miners of the Minas Gerais province in eighteenth-century Brazil.

The writer suggests that a connection between Congo-Angola arts and South Carolina pottery made by Afro-Americans is a distinct possibility and would seem likely in view of the particular slaving history of the area. This correspondence, if proved, would make definite the links between the Bakongo and Aiken County pottery. Indeed, because there are complex compromises made with Western technique, the phenomenon is more dynamic, historically, and consequently more interesting as a subject for study than a mechanical carry-over.

Finally, what is the meaning of the stylized anguish which contorts the face of the vessels, and for whom were the vessels made? Taking the last question first, the writer would guess that the Anglo-Americans who bought face vessels considered them amusing craft curiosities, a kind of visual minstrelsy, and even today the writer has heard an Anglo-American Georgian describe these works as "their idea of art." A patronizing patronage does not make much sense as a sustaining force for the autonomous wit and invention and care which went into the making of the finest of these vessels. Their excellence goes against the grain of what we know about the low productivity of slaves in the ante-bellum South. Bondage, Eugene Genovese (1965: 43) tells us, forced the Afro-American to give his labor grudgingly and badly. The low productivity resulted from inadequate care, training, and incentives. One can hardly suggest that the artistic excellence of the Aiken County artisanate was the testament of a rare circle of contented slaves. In the presence of the ferocity and energy expressed by the best of these Afro-Carolinian vessels, one senses a shift in attitude, a craft based on the self-generated incentive of a vital culture, standing apart from the nature of most pre-Civil War Southern Afro-American industry. The distinction, the writer would guess, stems from the fact that the Afro-American craftsmen made these vessels for themselves and their people for traditional reasons of their own. Under the noses of their masters they

succeeded in carving out a world of aesthetic autonomy.

C. Malcolm Watkins has informed the writer of a notice of Afro-Carolinian vessels having been found in Afro-Carolinian burial grounds, and the William Raiford Eve Collection includes pieces in which holes have been very carefully chipped out of the bottom, as if to break the objects without spoiling them, to prepare them as items of broken crockery, which traditionally covered the graves of Carolinians of African descent (Davis: 248). It is worth mentioning that broken household objects are placed on top of the tombs of the dead among the Bwende (Manker, 1932), who are part of the Kongo cluster of peoples from whom so many Afro-Carolinians seem to derive.

In a mortuary context these striking vessels may have served as protective devices and simultaneously as elements of prestige, excellent works by Afro-Americans for Afro-Americans, imperishable forces which make their manful aggression very plain. They may have also been used as containers of magical substances, although there is no evidence to this effect, and such a practice would have been conspicuous and would have attracted unfavorable attention. Yet one sees precisely what one is prepared to see, and in their ignorance of the vitality of African and African-influenced religions (cf. Jordan: 20ff) the Anglo-Saxons were certainly capable of having missed an entire dimension of New World creativity. The smug assignment of the works to Anglo-American folk art in later years compounded the possibility of ignorance.

Possibly Afro-Carolinian potters also created these vessels as a deliberate gallery of tormented faces in order to vent response to a slave environment. If we have learned anything about the nature of the traditional arts of Africa in recent years, it is that it is dangerous to assume monofunctionality for works of art and, indeed, these vessels, as in African instances, may have served a variety of functions, separately or concurrently. The artists of imperial Benin worked images of long-nosed Portuguese soldiers into the coiffure of an ivory representation of their ruler as a suggestion of the power of their state to incorporate the power of the foreigner. So the potters of South Carolina may have alluded to their oppressor the better to absorb his power.

The pottery burlesque attributed to Jim Lee has more in common with Anglo-American potters' jests than with the parallel sculpture of social allusion in the African vein where sculptors shape noses with deliberate crookedness to poke fun at the pompous, the foreign, or the corrupt, or, at a different analytic level, massively exaggerate the eyes of an image to suggest the moral wrath of the ancestors in contexts of tribal jurisprudence.

Afro-Carolinian face vessels, at their best, represent a related deliberate shaping of generalized principles of visual disorder; they are not portraits of named buffoons. To this extent they seem palpably influenced by African notions of generic mimesis.

The possibility that these images were stylized assertions of Afro-American resistance in the face of the exploitative aggression of the Anglo-Saxon is suggested by the combination of sharp teeth, bulging eyes, and contorted lips. The suggestion dovetails with a documented instance of assertive satire in choreography, recounted by a South Carolina "strut gal" (accomplished dancer) who received special privileges at Beaufort in the 1840s because of her talent:

Us slaves watched the white folks' parties where the guests danced a minuet and then paraded in a grand march. Then we'd do it too, but we used to mock 'em, every step. Sometimes the white folks noticed it but they seemed to like it. I guess they thought we couldn't dance any better [Stearns and Stearns, 1968: 22].

Afro-Carolinian potters could equally assume that their deliberate distortions, for whatever multiple purposes, would be misapprehended as lack of skill and therefore would be considered harmless and amusing. Is it possible that the small Afro-Carolinian vessels were provocatory devices, trapping the visually sensitive into a consideration of aggression in the Western world, the monkey on the back of the Afro-American and the conscience of a nation? Could this distillation of visual anguish have been simultaneously antidotal, on the theory that the best way to defeat an antagonistic force is to absorb its power? It is to be hoped that future research may bring to light evidence which will enable us to test such hypotheses.

Tidewater Georgia

Here an important source of Afro-American art in the United States was identified during a search for survivals organized in the late 1930s by Miss Mary Granger for the Georgia Writers' Project of the Works Project Administration. The amazing sculptures of the Afro-Americans of tidewater Georgia are correlated with a significant density of Afro-American population—70 percent black in 1790—and the fact that slaves were being brought to this area direct from Africa, illegally, as late as 1854. In older colonies like Virginia, Miss Granger points out, plantations were already sufficiently supplied with American-born slaves and the long period of contact with the West had blurred or complicated African customs.

Artistic consequences of this fact are immediate and very clear. Clay sculpture, for one instance, was fashioned on Wilmington Island in the last century:

The African men used to all the time make little clay images. Sometimes they like men and sometimes they like animals. Once they made a big one. They put a spear in his hand and walk around him and say he was the chief [*Drums and Shadows*, Georgia Writers' Project: 106].

In an Afro-American quarter of Savannah, for another instance, Lonnon Denerson, himself African-born, cicatrized his daughter with an irregular circle one and one-eighth inch in diameter. She was perhaps one of the few citizens of the United States living in the present century with the mark of a West African form of cicatrization.

There was even a fleeting existence of African architecture, on St. Simons Island, when an African-born man named Okra suddenly built a habitation in the manner of his ancestors. The building is said to have measured approximately twelve by fourteen feet in plan, had a dirt floor, daub-and-wattle walls ("the side like basket weave with clay plaster on it"), and a flat brush and palmetto roof. In perfect evocation of the windowlessness of much subsaharan traditional architecture, the only source of light was the single door. But, "Massa make him pull it down. He say he ain't want no African hut

on he place" (*Drums and Shadows*: 179).

Thus clay sculpture, cicatrization, and architecture briefly existed in isolated fragments. The main continuity, however, lasting well into this century and perhaps still alive in a few settlements, was wood sculpture. The forms of expression, such as canes and small animal figures, were familiar to Westerners and not blatantly African, as were a mark on the chest or a habitation made of earth, hence not so likely to challenge Anglo-Saxon propriety. There are three main types of Afro-Georgian sculpture: (1) walking sticks embellished with figural relief; (2) small statuary in the round; (3) virtuoso openwork abstraction carved out of single pieces of wood. The second type consists of full-length frontal human figures, small busts of human figures, armless frontal standing figures, and dolls. Reptiles seem the emphasized members of the animal kingdom (snakes, lizards, frogs, alligators), but small carvings of dogs and rabbits have also been documented. The implied interaction of man and the reptile world also characterizes much of the relief decoration of walking sticks. Some virtuoso abstractions are chains carved from single pieces of wood, recalling Surinam.

The work of the men following this tradition is qualitatively very uneven. This variability may be correlated with the vitality of consciously African-inspired artistic criticism within particular settlements, on the theory that distraction by Western materialism creates a weakening of visual inheritance. It seems that some of these men probably did not, despite the African flavor of their themes, identify themselves with Africa. Conscious separation from the cultures of Africa extends back several generations, as suggested by the comment of William Quarterman, of Darien, who remembered having heard African speech but added, "You can't understand much what these people say. They go 'quack, quack, quack' just as fast as a horse can run, and my pa say aint no good to listen to them."

But there were some Afro-Georgians who did hear the voices of the past. One was James Cooper of Port Wentworth, a suburb of Savannah. Inspiration came from his grandfather, Pharoah Cooper, who also carved objects in wood. James Cooper was a true *bricoleur* and earned his living not only selling lunches to the workers of the Savannah Sugar Refinery but also cobbling shoes and repairing as

discrete a collection of objects as chinaware and rollerskates. Yet his real gift lay in the field of sculpture, a point which was not lost upon the Afro-American community, wherein he was widely known by the affectionate nickname of "Stick Daddy," in praise of his ingeniously embellished walking sticks. (A West African precedent may be cited: attributive names lauding artistic skills, names which may themselves become works of art, as in the instance of the master of Ilaro, Nigeria, whose praise name meant literally "possessed-of-a-knife-like-a-whip.")

Stick Daddy's sense of design was firm. Motifs (mostly snakes, tortoises, and alligators, to judge from a published sampling of his work) were carved on the side of the staff in low relief and stained; reptile relief was further outlined with a "nimbus" of unfinished wood against an even ground of stained area. Stick Daddy decorated his representations of reptiles with geometric incised designs of characteristic width and depth revealing the white of the unstained wood. In his style a tortoise shell becomes a kind of shield, bearing opposed half-circles flanking the long axis, smaller crescents the short. His representations of alligators are, like the tortoises, carved as if seen from above, except that in this case areas delimited by half-circles are sometimes bisected by two parallel short lines or are carved out as a shallow void. Subsequent research will identify the sources and continuities of this highly arbitrary method of linear embellishment.

Accessible data indicate that the master of the south coast of Georgia was William Rogers (1865-1952) of Darien, the county seat of McIntosh. Rogers was born when African languages were still being spoken in Georgia and he perhaps had the opportunity in his youth to observe subsaharan-influenced sculptural activity. On the other hand, he followed a Western career of cabinet-making. In 1938, at the age of seventy-two, he spent such time as failing hands allowed him making figural sculpture and canes of partial African flavor in addition to scrollwork and other Western crafts. The latter work is important to remember when assessing his creativity.

At some point before 1938 William Rogers carved at Darien a wooden frog which has a raised triangular head and beaded eyes focusing upward, as if in search of an insect. The mouth is seamless.

Powerful shoulders lift the brilliantly rounded body of the frog. Articulation of the solid mass is achieved in such a way that the shoulders and hind quarters are carved as matching accents of some elegance over the curve of the body. To a certain extent they recall the equally rhythmic repetitions of the limbs of a Dahomean frog, except that the legs of the latter reptile were flattened and bracket-like.

The eyes of the Georgian frog come from blooded African stock. They are glass beads secured by minute brass nails which mark the pupil. The discussion of their African qualities will come later, but it might be pointed out that the eyes of the Dahomean frog in the collection of Charles Ratton make similar use of brass nails. By contrast, the three concentric rectangles forming the base, the innermost of which suggests a natural surface upon which the reptile rests, seem to reflect, in the heightened realism of the effect and the arbitrary framing of the subject matter, considerable Western influence.

Another sculpture by William Rogers of Darien is known. He carved in 1938 a figurated walking stick for Miss Mary Granger of Savannah. At the top of the staff is the head and bust of a human figure, whose parted seamless lips, extending the breadth of the face, recall the stylized mouth of the frog. The eyes of the human are blue beads secured with minute steel pins which indicate the pupil. The smooth, square skull and high-set ears are striking qualities of the human figure, painted blueish-black to identify the subject as an Afro-American, according to the owner of the staff. Diminutive arms are carved in relief on either side of the block of the body and each hand ends with four fingers. Carved immediately below the front of the human figure is the form of an alligator, positioned vertically and superbly dominating the upper register of the staff. The taste of the artist intervenes most visibly where the shoulders of the reptile are stylized with the same rounded muscle convention of the frog. The alligator rests upon an abstract plane, cut into the cylinder of the staff. The back of the beast has textural pattern suggesting the horny, plate-like scales of the species. The eyes of the alligator are blue beads secured with pins. There are six enigmatic ovals carved in low relief, parallel to the alligator; perhaps they represent riverain

stones. The contrast of black human figure against red cedar wood creates an aesthetic of handsome simplicity.

African influence is suggested by the choice of motifs (man and reptile), the simultaneous usage of two vantage points within a single composition (human seen from the front, alligator from above) and the implied conviction that beads are so valuable that their addition enhances the value of the object as a work of art. The African love of artistic bead-working is well known. More especially, the taste for mixing the main medium of the sculpture (wood, bone, brass) with a minor medium of beads, brass, or iron is very African and embraces such discrete traditions as the brass- or aluminum-plated figural sculpture of the Songye of Congo-Kinshasa, the iron-studded "konde" of the Bakongo, and even the beaded wood statuary of the Cameroon, where expressive roles are reversed and beads become the primary visual element. A Nigerian reference is very illuminating as to this tradition of mixing media and is in point with the Afro-Georgian sculpture:

The Bini artist's values are different from those of any Western artist: to produce such skilled work as the ivory ornamental mask and then to put two nail-heads in the eyes as pupils . . . [is] quite alien to values which [Westerners] put on what materials match or are appropriate to certain aesthetic situations [Dark, 1960: 25].

The point is richly illustrated by the wood twin figures of the Yoruba. In this tradition pupils are often indicated by nailheads of iron. But it is important to distinguish African bead or nail eyes from American. Two examples of Luba sculpture from Congo-Kinshasa (Fagg, 1968: 264-5) have blue beads to enhance the regard of the human visage. The beads are positioned, however, upon a protruding eye which reflects a complex tradition of sculptural intensification. The bead is the pupil. Oyo Yoruba twin figures also have eyes which often have nailheads indicating the pupil within a powerful curve of wood.

The face of the Afro-Georgian image by contrast is flat and the projection of the eye is formed by the bead and nail. The bead is the

eye. The distinction vitiates any diffusionist attempt to establish a particular African influence and seems to determine a generic continuity from subsaharan plastic traditions. It is this interesting cultivation of a foreign sensibility that unifies observations of animal and human existence in the work of William Rogers. When he died on July 14, 1952, a chapter of United States Afro-American art history came to an end.

Sunbury

We turn now to art for the dead. Broken earthenware adorns the surface of the graves of some Afro-Americans in remote areas of Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina, and carved wooden grave-markers have been found in association with these remarkable deposits at Pine Harbor and Sunbury in Georgia.

The peoples of West Africa have placed earthenware and other possessions on the top of graves for hundreds of years. Bosman (1708: 273) noted at Axim, a site on the coast of modern Ghana, that earthenware images were placed on the top of graves after what he termed "the purification of the interred" (the formal funeral?). Sieber (1965) finds that among the Kwahu of Ghana, terracotta images are made after the death and burial of an important person and are exhibited under a palm leaf shelter next to a specially constructed hearth where food for the dead is prepared. On the last day of the funeral, after dark, the hearth, shelter, wooden utensils, including a wooden pestle spoon, earthenware, and the terracotta images are taken to the cemetery of the rulers and placed over the grave. Nassau (1904: 218), speaking of the Benga, Mpongwe, and the Fang in the area between Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville, shows that "the dead man's goods, cloth, hardware, crockery, and so forth [are] laid by the body . . . on the top of the ground."

Similar burial customs are found in the Congo-Angola area, which, as has been said, was an important source of the slaves of tidewater South Carolina. Verly (1955) and others have described Bakongo graves in northern Angola as marked by granite boulders, heaps of pottery, including fragments of Delft and Swansea ware, wood sculpture, and human statuary carved in steatite. The burial ceremony of the **Bwende**, part of the Kongo cluster of peoples, has been de-

scribed in some detail by E. Manker (1932: 159-172), from which is excerpted the fact that, after the interment, broken household objects are placed on top of the tomb, and the house of the dead kinsman is burned. The apparent symbolism is most interesting—body destroyed by death: broken possessions and burned house. The most important fact about the West African funeral use of earthenware fragments is that the pieces are not actually interred but are carefully placed on the surface of the grave.

The main outlines of this West African tradition reappear in parts of Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina as an almost classic demonstration of the nature of a generic survival. The fusion of slaves from the Gold Coast, the Congo-Angola area, and other parts of the Guinea Coast in Southern slavery could mean the reinforcement of the African notion that the funeral is the climax of life and that the dead should be honored by having their possessions placed upon the top of their graves. "Whatever else has been lost of aboriginal custom," wrote Herskovits (1958: 63), "the attitudes towards the dead, as manifested in meticulous rituals cast in the mold of West African patterns, have survived."

The deposit of chinaware and other objects on the Afro-American grave is in contrast with the stark plots of grass which cover the graves of Americans of European descent. Puckett (105) enumerates the sorts of memorial items found over the graves of Afro-South Carolinians: bleached sea shells, broken glassware, broken pitchers, soap dishes, lamp chimneys, tureens, coffee cups, syrup jugs, ornamental vases, cigar boxes, gun locks, tomato containers, teapots, fragments of stucco, plaster images, fragments of carved stonework, glass lamps, and tumblers. A touching variant identifies the grave of a child: diminutive china objects, the heads of dolls, and toys.

Two early twentieth-century graves in Mississippi (Puckett: 106) glitter with surface china, suggesting the rumpled vitality of a vanished life. The use of the fragments seems deliberate: pieces are aligned to show the length of the grave in a simple axial statement. Around another grave in the same state five poles have been placed, and these lean inward as if sheltering the spirit within the earth.

The associations in the mind of the Afro-Americans who practice this custom are extremely interesting. Consider the allegations of

five Afro-Georgians, whose testimony, collected circa 1939, is preceded by the name of the particular settlement of the informant, from *Drums and Shadows*. Darien: "Them dishes and bottles what put on the grave is for the spirit and ain't for nobody to touch them. That's for the spirit to feel at home." Harris Neck: "At a funeral the bottles and dishes and other possessions belonging to the departed person were left on the grave. 'The spirit needs these—just like when they's alive.'" Harris Neck (another informant): "You put dishes and bottles and all the pretty pieces what they like on the grave. You always break these things before you put 'em down. You break [them] so that the chain will be broke. You see, the one person is dead and if you don't break the things, then the others in the family will die, too." Brownville: "They used to put the things a person used last on the grave. This was supposed to satisfy the spirit and keep it from following you back to the house." Pinpoint: "Everybody there threw a handful of dirt on the grave and when the gravediggers fixed the mound we put some of Catherine's things on the top. There was a little flower vase with the bottom knocked out, and the pitcher she made ice water in."

The last detail is impressive. An intimate act characteristic of the deceased is recalled forever on the surface of the grave by means of the particular object selected. What appears to be a random accumulation is in fact the distillation of a life.

The burial ground of the Bowens family at Sunbury, as landscaped and embellished by Cyrus Bowens, is a dramatic furthering of some of these themes. The small plot, fenced off as a unit, is found in the Sunbury Baptist Church Cemetery in the Trade Hill section of Liberty County, Georgia (Cate: 217). First, Cyrus Bowens created graves essentially as concrete slabs laid in the earth, with headstone at one end, smaller stone at the other, suggesting an eternal bed. Secondly, iron poles slung over a few of these graves serve as supports for pots occasionally overflowing with flowers, an evident extension of the desire to soften the nature of the site with deliberate domesticity. Thirdly, Bowens assembled some of the traditional means of Afro-American grave embellishment and set them in concrete while the substance was still wet, as permanently embedded parts of the headstone and grave. Thus, the grave of Aaron Bowens is

surmounted by a headstone in which is set the headlight of an automobile, gleaming like a glass eye, while the grave of Rachel Bowens is decorated with a marker bearing an inscription over which presides the mark of a human hand. A piece of mirror is embedded in the palm of the hand. A neighboring grave has an enameled pitcher set in the horizontal concrete slab covering the earth and might be compared to similar graves in concrete in modern Nigeria where the teapots used by Muslim Yoruba for ablutions are added to their graves as permanently installed decorations. Lastly, Bowens carved wood sculpture as the focus of the burial ground.

Bowens creates real figural sculpture in space, not an ornamental outline on the slate of a gravemarker. He seems to have mastered two plastic traditions, the one static and rectilinear, the other dynamic and free-soaring, to judge from a program of three sculptures he carved in wood. These sculptures were photographed in situ in the early spring of 1940 by Muriel and Malcolm Bell, Jr., of Savannah, for the Georgia Writers' Project.

The center sculpture is essentially a sphere on a cylinder. Ovals are cut into the cylinder to represent human eyes and a slight curved line below indicates the mouth. A few inches below the simplified head are carved the letters spelling Bowens. The flanking sculptures no longer exist, and when the writer studied the surviving central sculpture in December 1968 he found that it had weathered considerably and that members of the Bowen family had whitewashed the image in order to prevent further deterioration.

To the left of the human figure stood a work composed of two elements, a base, and the representation of a serpent. The base was an everted fork, the handle of which supports the whole. The serpent was carved from a single curved branch of a tree and was nailed to the support. The serpent formed a single dramatic curve and the neck was arched, as if the viper were about to strike. Although the form of the base suggests striding legs, comparison with a replacement sculpture documented by Margaret Davis Cate confirms the representation of a serpent, for in this version there is a distinct separation between stand and reptile, and the modulation of the curve occurs at the head, as in a serpent, and not at the body, as in a bird. Flanking the other side of the human figure was an incredible

sculpture soaring more than twelve feet into the air. The sculpture was described by Mary Granger as the representation of a bird, but a visual check reveals that the powerful curve which forms the defining gesture of the work also recalls a serpent.

Sustained fieldwork is needed before a convincing exegesis of this construction can be written. Near the summit of the work a horizontal bar has been nailed against the vertical shaft and two short vertical strips of wood intersect the horizontal bar on either side of the shaft. The shaft descends from this point as a continuous line, dropping into a shallow curve before sweeping into a horseshoe arc. Within the curve of this portion of the sculpture is placed a horizontal bar, attached at one end to the widest point of the curve and, at the other, to a vertical bar which closes the curve and connects the base of the work to the shaft above. A short vertical strip of wood has been nailed to the center of this horizontal bar, a partial echo of the summit ornament. In sum, the long branch of a tree has been selected and set at the vertical by the sculptor to give rise to a memorable sculpture.

The uncompromising simplicity of the work recalls modern Western sculpture, especially Constantin Brancusi. The Rumanian and the Afro-Georgian share a common approach to fundamentals in the use of simplified masses, harnessed exponential curves, and reduction to geometric essences. Their convergence may well reflect distant and independent absorption of African influence (cf. Goldwater, 1967: 233). The possibility of a relationship between the use of natural tree branches as the given of sculpture in the work of Bowens and the famous bent-branch sculpture traditions of the Congo-Angola area remains to be tested. Both Bowens and Congo-Angola sculptors exploit the accidental features of branches to make a work of art in human form.

The death of Bowens on February 19, 1966, marks the end of the Afro-American artistic heritage of his village. The writer visited the ruins of his house on December 22, 1968. The house is overwhelmed, today, by a sea of wild grass and the roof is open to the sky, the blue of heaven reflected brilliantly in the mirror of the dressing table of the dead sculptor, which his friends and survivors have not touched but allowed to fall to pieces slowly in the Georgia

sun. Before the vanished steps of the front of the house, scratched in a kind of concrete stepping stone, is still visible a date and the impress of the sole of the shoe of the artist. It seems certain that Cyrus Bowens realized that historians would be interested in the story of his life.

Fayetteville, New York

An important sculpture, evidently Afro-American, was carved in wood in this village ten miles east of Syracuse, possibly during the period 1836-65. The work represents a male figure seated upon a block. He is frontally positioned and encircles with both arms a large vessel which rests upon his knees. The pose recalls some forms of African sculpture, as for example the frontally disposed figures with vessel characterizing the cult statuary for the riverain king Eyinle in southwest Yoruba country.

The face of the figure is like a mask. The small eyes are in low relief and the nose is broad but projecting slightly, so that the strongest trait is the mouth. The form of the nose and the lips suggest an Afro-American subject. The pursed lips create an impression of dignity and collectedness of mind. On the other hand, the pressing of the knees together, the gesture of the hands (right fingers closed, left open), and the slight turning of the head to the left suggest the lack of tension is only apparent. As to the neutral details of the sculpture, the shirt of the figure is high-collared and has long sleeves, the trousers are cuffed, and the shoes (or feet) are unfinished. The image may have been once completely painted a dark indigo blue, but traces of red pigment are now visible.

The sobriety of palette, equilibrated pose, frozen face, pursed lips, and the holding of a vessel forward are mixed formal and iconographic traits which suggest a degree of African influence. But the Western elements are very strong—the “proper” relation of head to body, the phrasing of the fingers (African hands in wood sculpture are often simplified and calm) and, of course, the style of dress. Most especially, the facial traits are rendered according to Western canons of dimension and siting, with the eyes carefully centered and small instead of having been sited on the sides of the face for expressionist flavor, or glittering with added available metal or beads or

shells. The blending of Western and possibly African elements seems to favor the former source, and one might consider the sculpture a visual parallel to contemporary spirituals marked by considerable Western influence. Yet the interweaving of aspects tense and decorous, although achieved with many non-African means, distinguishes a masterpiece in the Afro-American vein.

The attribution is based on the fact that no trace of caricature or social distance, between maker and subject, can be detected. This is extremely rare for a century when the Afro-American as grotesque was all the rage in the lithographs of Currier and Ives and black-faced performers in minstrelsy parodied a world they never understood. The manly dignity of the image at hand is removed from the half-apologetic, half-ingratiating smiles of this other world. If the piece was carved by an Anglo-American, his sympathy for his subject and the cultural accuracy of his stylistic means were amazing for his century and would almost make him qualify as a kind of honorary Afro-American in the manner of John Brown.

A prominent Anglo-American miller at Fayetteville, Hiram Wood, first owned the image and told his daughter, Martha Louise (born in 1842), when he gave the image to her, that a hired man working in one of his mills had carved the piece in his leisure time. The son of Martha Wood, Harry Wood Andrews, sold the work via two antique dealers to the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum in Colonial Williamsburg.

The career of Hiram Wood provides a key to the dating of the sculpture. Wood entered the milling business in 1836 and maintained two grist and flouring mills until 1840. He resumed trade in 1849. In October 1865 he sold what was by then one of the largest milling operations in Onondaga County and retired (Rivette, 1968: 5; personal communication). One infers, consequently, that the object was carved during the period 1836-65.

Fayetteville is one mile from the Erie Canal and was witness to considerable migration in the last century, including a heavy traffic in fugitive slaves, which may explain why an Afro-American work of art appears in Onondaga County. In 1845 the Reverend Samuel Joseph May, an abolitionist and a follower of William Lloyd Garrison, moved to Syracuse, where Afro-American fugitives from several

Southern states came to him. The fact that an ex-slave from Tennessee, the Reverend Jermain W. Loguen, founded the African Methodist Church in Syracuse at the same time implies a considerable number of free Afro-Americans in Onondaga County.

The anonymous sculptor might have been a free Afro-American of the Fayetteville area. There were ten persons of African descent living about Fayetteville in 1830, fourteen in 1840, five in 1850, and six in 1855. Half of the ten families in 1865 were of Southern origin (Rivette, 1969: personal communication). Insufficient evidence makes impossible at present the identification of a millworker in this group. Federal and state census documents do not record the names of the men who worked for Hiram Wood. All that can be established is that there was a pool of Afro-American labor from which the talented carver might have come.

The assumption of Afro-American authorship turns on the visual evidence alone. Data furnish no absolute proof. Whoever he was, the artist seems no stranger to the idealist qualities which characterize many of the aristocratic arts of the Guinea Coast. This mid-nineteenth-century work transcends with subtle dignity the complicated and acrid savor of Afro-American existence.

Conclusions

Contrary to general opinion, important Afro-American and African-influenced art exists in the United States. The tradition lacks the richness of the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian aesthetic, but there are a number of sculptures of comparable merit. The fact that wood sculpture is the predominant medium suggests the depth of the tradition, for while painting is the classic art of the West, sculpture in wood plays a comparably central role south of the Sahara.

There are seven traits common to most United States Afro-American sculpture that suggest African influence.

1. *Monochromy or bichromy.* The deep red and blueish-black painted wood at Fayetteville, the reddish cedar complicated by blueish-black painted wood at Darien, the single black tone used by Henry Gudgell in Livingston County, and the monochromy of the work of Cyrus Bowens recall the West African economy of palette. Olbrechts (1934) went too far when he characterized the use of

polychromy in traditional African sculpture as a mark of decadence, but the fact remains that, in the main, the African sculptor—or his patron—paints the carved image in black or red monochrome (Wingert, 1950: 4). In many instances these are the very colors combined in Afro-American bichromy. The Afro-Carolinian ceramic presents a new but equally restricted usage: kaolin against glaze.

2. *Smooth, luminous surfaces.* The relative glitter of carefully smoothed surfaces defines the method of finishing in much tropical African and Afro-American sculpture. The troubling of the surface of a representation of a human being with the signs and furrows of emotion or old age is rare in tropical Africa (but satire and moral vengeance are important exceptions) and does not appear in the United States at all with the exception of the gritty sand glaze surface of some Afro-Carolinian ceramics.

3. *Equilibrated gestures.* Statuary made by men of African-derived culture stands or is seated upright, in frontal position, with arms symmetrically disposed. This calm and ordered appearance mirrors the equilibrated compositions of most of West Africa (with the exception of Bakongo torsion and the forceful diagonals of the art of the Fon people of Dahomey). The Nigerian potter Abatan of Oke-Odan and the anonymous sculptor of Fayetteville achieve a mood of repose by similar structural means.

4. *Frozen faces.* This quality extends the calm of much West African figural sculpture. Available evidence suggests that many West African dancers and sculptures alike present to the world a “mask” uncompromised by signs of specific emotion. Identically “cool” faces characterize most Afro-United States statuary, with the exception of the Afro-Carolinian ceramic.

The calm face seems an aspect of ideal human conduct, pursed-lip dignity. Consider the experience of a Works Project Administration fieldworker at an Afro-American settlement on the margin of Savannah in the late 1930s. Here she encountered a man named George Boddison, one of the two rulers of the barrio called “Tin City.” Boddison met her with a copper wire wound about his head, to which were attached two broken pieces of mirror, reflecting side up, so that they flashed and glittered whenever he moved his head. Boddison presented a spectacular instance of the continuity of the

use of African-derived charms in modern Georgia, his headdress recalling, to cite but one precedent, the circlets of ornamented talismans which protect the head of some of the traditional rulers of the Ashanti today in Ghana (Kyerematen, 1964: 31). But what really haunted the interviewer was the frozen face of George Boddison: "When we thanked him he did not smile but only bowed his head. To the end of the interview he kept his dignified and serious demeanor" (*Drums and Shadows*: 21). Afro-American sculpture is striking for a similar expression of concentrated hauteur.

5. *Beaded, shell, or metal eyes*. The use of available metal or beads to mark the eyes in West African sculpture creates a visual experience distinct from that conjured by works of art in the Western world. The taste reflects a larger pattern in West African cultures of mixed media compositions; an image can not only be adorned with nail-head eyes, driven into the wood, but also brass studs, feathers, tin, or sheet brass in such a way as to sometimes disguise the wood basis of the figure altogether.

The distinction between Yoruba and Luba usages of beaded eyes and the cognate stylistic device of William Rogers of Darien has been noted. The possible West African sources of this trait are in fact almost limitless, for bead as well as nail or cowrie shell eyes are found in a variety of societies. As early as 1926 Guillaume and Munro had noted that the West African is "especially fond of giving a flashing regard to the eyes by inserting beads, shells, stones, or bits of metal." It is just possible, furthermore, that the Afro-Carolinian ceramic represents a transformation of this tradition as the natural consequence of Western craft adoption, transposing glaze for the surface of the wood, setting spheres of white clay into the pottery for the white of cowrie shell eyes, or setting tin into wood.

6. *Synoptic vision*. The term has been used by William Fagg (1963) to designate in the court art of Benin in Nigeria the simultaneous use of two or more vantage points within the same frame of visual reference. The same remark might be made apropos of the men-seen-from-the-front in juxtaposition with reptiles-seen-from-above in Afro-Georgian modes of walking stick relief, as well as the variant mode at Livingston County, Missouri (man viewed from behind, reptiles viewed from above). A reasonable objection might

be that a sculptor would have no recourse but to depict men and reptiles in this manner within the compass of a restricted composition. But, in fact, examination of the grotesque walking sticks peculiar to the folk traditions of the Netherlands province of North Brabant, which involve a certain amount of mixed human and reptilian imagery, demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case and that the normal rules of Western one-point perspective can still apply (cf. Hansen: 226). One of these Netherlandish walking sticks shows a snake in full relief that surges off the plane of the cane and into the hand of a human figure which surmounts the cane. At the point where this contact occurs, both serpent and man are viewed from one point. In other words, the Netherlandish folk carvers could not resist carving the heads of their reptiles so that they break the plane of the cane realistically at the same time that they are viewed in tightly organized perspectival schemes. Afro-American and African depictions of reptiles are by contrast iconic and frozen parallel to the plane of the cane, identical in this regard to the flattened lizards and crocodiles which figure in much of the relief sculpture seen on doors in a variety of West African architectural sculpture.

7. *The repertory of motifs.* Reptiles (frogs, lizards, tortoises, alligators, serpents) and human figures are the pervasive themes of the African-influenced sculpture of the American South. Stick Daddy carved a walking stick ending with an improvised metal finial in which was inserted the photograph of an Afro-American female. The staff itself was decorated with relief representations, consisting of, from top to bottom, a tortoise, an alligator, and a serpent. The design is like a permutation of the composition used by Henry Gudgell, where similar motifs were arranged in slightly different order. These compositions may, in turn, be compared to a Woyo chiefly staff from Congo-Kinshasa, reflecting in its lighter weight usage as a baton or scepter. The African staff is surmounted by a human figure over a shaft decorated with a serpent and a lizard.

The carved frog from Darien relates to the carved representations of the same reptile in the sculpture of the barrios of Afro-American Savannah (*Drums and Shadows*: 70). The abstract figure of a man set beside a reptile in the Bowens burial ground at Sunbury is analogous to the man over the reptile in the walking stick carved at

Darien.

Anthropologists have long noted the dangers of lifting cultural facts out of context in comparison with other facts lifted out of context. However, the historic ties between coastal Georgia and West Africa have been documented; hence the comparison of the repertory of iconic themes in Afro-American sculpture from Georgia with African art is conducted within a known historical framework. Reptiles are often metaphors of human achievement in West African art. Are they so interpreted by Afro-Americans in Georgia? One would reason that at least fragments of the original communicative function reappear in the United States, but the fact is that we do not know.

A single motif in the absence of further African-seeming details, such as the use of beads to mark the eyes, is insufficient evidence of continuity. There is a Civil War cane which has an entwined serpent, but its maker was an officer of the Confederate Army (Burtscher, 1945: 50). Only where humans and reptiles appear in the same composition and are carved, as in Africa, with a clarity and iconic strength suggesting the incarnation of special power may one hazard the guess that the themes transcend the realm of independent invention or derivation from Europe.

The careful spacing of the depiction of tortoises, lizards, and so forth in Afro-Georgian modes is distinct from Netherlandish walking sticks, which are embellished with human couples surprised in the act of coitus, groups of reptiles, and other grotesqueries, recalling to a certain extent some of the paintings of Brueghel. In this European tradition, reptiles are crowded together, in contrast to the careful separation of motifs, one from the other, in Afro-American sculpture. If grotesque walking sticks from Europe influenced the Afro-Georgian aesthetic (and the writer does not think it is very likely), stronger ancestral impulses transformed these naturalistic whimsies into a sober iconic art of deeper purpose. Were the motifs determined by the ecology of tidewater Georgia, this would not explain why they recur in Missouri or why other tidewater fauna are not included in the thematic vocabulary of the Afro-American carvers. And why is there an evident absence of a corresponding Anglo-American form of sculpture in this province?

It is more reasonable to suppose, in the opinion of the writer, that reptiles are privileged forms of the African-derived visual tradition of coastal Georgia, and some other parts of the South, as a direct reflection of their great importance in the arcana of the native Afro-American medicine of the area. In former times Afro-Americans in tidewater Georgia ascribed illness to witches in the form of reptile familiars. Consider these four allegations, again listed by settlement followed by source in *Drums and Shadows* Springfield: "There's a human round you what can make a hand to put any kind of insect in your body. She can kill an insect and grind it to powder and rub it on the skin of a person or give it to him to drink. When it enter the body it turn back into insect, sometimes a lizard, or a frog, or a snake." Brownfield: "Conjure is being practiced all the time. Frogs and lizards and such things is injected into peoples' bodies and the people fall ill and sometimes die." Pine Barren: "Folks what is conjured have snakes in 'em and sometimes frogs." Springfield: "I could feel the snake running all through me. If I had killed that snake, it sure would have been Flossie Hopkins."

Puckett (1926: 249ff) shows how these beliefs were once prevalent throughout the Afro-American quarters of the South. He cites an instance where a woman was conjured but went immediately to a "hoodoo doctor," who took a frog and a lizard out of her. And he describes how these exorcisms were done:

A woman thought she had lizards running up and down under her skin. A Negro hoodoo woman was called in . . . this woman had a lizard hidden in her sleeve, and, waiting for the frenzy to come upon the patient, she gently massaged her arm, pretending to work the lizard down the patient's arm to the fingertips. Then she gave a sudden fling and [slung the lizard out of her sleeve and onto the floor]. Curious onlookers cried and fled. The woman was from that moment cured [p. 303-04].

It is a traditional belief in some parts of West Africa that witches travel in the form of animals—owls, bats, black cats, and so on—to visit death or disease upon their victims (Parrinder, 1961: 168).

Compare in this regard the testimony of George Boddison of Tin City, Georgia: "A person can take such a thing as a cat or a dog or a lizard. They can kill this animal and they have some way to cause its spirit to be evil. But these [charms] that I wears keeps all these things from hurting me." On the opposite side of Savannah, in another Afro-American quarter, a woman testified: "Witches is like folks. Some get a grudge against you and starts to ride you. No matter what you do, they can get in your house. Sometimes they come like a mouse, sometimes a rabbit, and sometimes even a roach." But the main forms in the South seem to be reptiles.

Information from the Congo-Angola sector of West Africa (Biebuyck, 1969: personal communication) suggests an origin for these beliefs. Whereas the Yoruba and related peoples ascribe illness to witches in the form of birds, some of the traditional societies of the lower reaches of the Congo River believe that all kinds of enemies present themselves in the form of crocodiles and certain species of snakes.

Southern Afro-Americans in coastal Georgia, having relatively little access to Anglo-American medicine, used the "parallel science of magic" (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1962) to provide a theater where conventionalized notions of pathological causation could be isolated and controlled. Traditional Afro-American healers cured their patients by presenting them with the cause of their illness and their fears in tangible reptilian form. And it is a fact that in economically insecure societies psychosomatic disorders are common and respond often dramatically to psychotherapy (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1967: 174).

The existence of a carved walking stick embellished with an entwined serpent has been reported in the Charleston, South Carolina, area, and the name of the object was given as a "conjure stick." (Chase, 1969: personal communication). It is also interesting to note that the career of Allen Parker, of the quarter of Tatemville in Savannah, embraced both sculpture and conjuring, so that perhaps by no accident the sorts of animals he carved—snakes, lizards, frogs, dogs, alligators, and rabbits—are almost without exception the traditional zoomorphic metaphors of human pathology in the folklore of the Afro-Georgian. In addition, one Afro-American traditional doctor in the South was famed for a crooked stick which, it is said,

when thrown down and picked up, admonished and thrown down again, writhed like a serpent, becoming still when picked up by its master (*Southern Workman*, 1895, Vol. 24: 118). This interesting legend may have been inspired by the presence of an entwined serpent, carved in wood, on an actual conjuring cane.

Since the world of witches and enemies is very real in the minds of traditional West Africans and some of their descendants in the South of the United States, both culture areas believe that it is imperative to have someone—in Africa the ruler or the diviner, in Georgia the healer—who can operate within this world on behalf of mankind, and such a person must of necessity incarnate powers of witchcraft himself. Can it be that the frequent opposition of reptilian and human themes in the relief sculpture adorning walking sticks and a documented “conjuring stick” constitutes a coded visual declaration of the power of the healer, and perhaps others, to discover those enemies who come in the form of snakes and lizards and to neutralize them? We do not have the data to test this theory. The writer would suggest, however, that close comparative study of the iconology of the chiefly staffs found along the lower reaches of the Congo and the walking sticks and conjuring sticks of tidewater Georgia and South Carolina might yield provocative information which would considerably deepen our knowledge of African artistic continuity in the United States.

The traditional art of the Afro-American in the United States represents a fusion and simplification of some of the themes of the sculpture of West Africa. The American mosaic by and large defies assignment to exact West African civilizations, although the Congo-Angola area seems a most plausible source for some of the aspects we have noted. The situation reflects a traumatic slave experience. Artistic continuities are consequently generic, simple, and restricted to areas of dense and recent contact with tropical Africa, with occasional isolated instances such as Fayetteville and Livingston County. Here are treasures from a sensibility which could not be policed out of existence.

It must not be assumed that the subject is limited to the areas briefly remarked in the preceding pages. Louisiana awaits an inten-

sive search for possible Afro-American visual continuities, and a related possible field of research is the coast of Alabama, where it is reported (Charters, 1967: 148) that fragments of the West African religion of the Fon of Dahomey (*vodun*) exist as an element of contemporary folk culture. The slight possibility that fragments of a visual tradition might be recoverable among groups of Afro-Alabamians living along the Tombigbee River and in the Taladega National Forest, who reportedly use some African phrases in their speech, merits investigation. And a wrought-iron standing figure, found on the site of slave quarters in Virginia, attributed to the eighteenth century (University of St. Thomas Art Department, 1966: 107), needs study against the history of Afro-American blacksmithing and the history of wrought-iron sculpture in tropical Africa.

Finally, the Smithsonian Institution recently acquired an interesting "bible quilt," said to have been made by an elderly Afro-American farm woman, thus far known only as Harriett, about 1886 on the outskirts of Athens, Georgia. The work is divided into rectangular panels, each devoted to a particular biblical scene. The panels are filled with appliquéd silhouettes of human figures and animals, human figures with geometric motifs (rosettes and circles), and other design combinations. Stylistically, the sharply outlined figures recall, somewhat, the chiefly textiles of Dahomey in West Africa, as does the technique of appliqué itself, but this Afro-Georgian textile shows considerable Western influence in the attempt to tell an entire story in each panel and, of course, in the nature of the iconography. An artistic biography of the maker, if possible, would clarify her influences at the same time that the nature of her individuality would be established. The Smithsonian acquisition is mentioned as an indication of the fact that undoubtedly further treasures of Afro-United States art await discovery by students of the field.

In time the contours of an entire tradition will emerge, sufficient to discredit the apriorists, who believe that the traditional Afro-American art of the United States is "devoid of tribal and religious associations" and is merely the work of isolated folk craftsmen, hence not on the level of legitimate art historical concern (cf. Canaday, 1968: 37). The old assumptions, which elevate ignorance

to definition, will disappear before the truth.

If there are few specific ties to West African civilizations, generic resemblances are certainly present and shared ideas about certain reptiles as emblems of power may have informed the rise of some of the preferred motifs of coastal Georgian relief sculpture. Moreover, in Georgia, at least, the artists were not isolated. Many of them lived and worked in the city of Savannah, and the relationships between their art and the art of Sunbury and Darien suggests a shared intellectual history. Afro-United States art is also multifaceted: dignified and cool at Fayetteville, discordant and hot at Aiken, reduced to essences at Sunbury, voiced elegantly in Livingston County.

To point out with surprise that the tradition does not mirror the heroic nature of the aristocratic arts of Ghana, Nigeria, or Congo-Kinshasa is to suffer from historical amnesia. This was an art of slaves and the descendants of slaves. Their creative vision persisted in the face of a system designed to make children forever of men. Slavery and crypto-slavery might have destroyed those realities by which the Afro-American experienced self-awareness had it not been for his profound and intractable sense of beauty. Mankind must applaud Afro-American art in the United States for its sheer existence, a triumph of creative will over forces of destruction.

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checked a portion of the essay and the last sentence reflects, in part, a conversation in January 1969 during which he remarked that “that it exists at all is what is important about Afro-American art.”

The response of scholars and librarians asked to check certain details is very warmly recorded. I am especially in the debt of Mrs. Edward Webb and Mr. Albert Sanders, of the Charleston Museum, for their efforts to elucidate the nature of the Afro-Carolinian artisanate in pottery and for their copying of precious data about Afro-Carolinian creativity in the archives of the Charleston Museum. Thanks to their labors it is possible to talk about four named Afro-Carolinian ceramists. Mrs. Barbara Rivette, Manlius Town Historian, labored valiantly to furnish census records on Afro-Americans in Onondaga County during the time when the Fayetteville image was believed to have been carved. The story of Henry Gudgell of Livingston County, Missouri, has been clarified by the researches of Elizabeth Coffman and Earle S. Teegarden, of Chillicothe. The latter interviewed the daughter of a slave who worked for Gudgell’s master in order to clarify certain points. Patrick Pleskunas made a field trip to Chillicothe where he discovered the fact that Gudgell had been a silversmith in addition to his known talent as woodcarver. Pleskunas also brought to my attention Houck’s interesting notice of apparent African-influenced body painting in eighteenth-century St. Louis. Roy Sieber found time from his tasks as chairman of the Indiana University Department of Fine Arts to share many insights on the art history of Ghana and considerably enriched the section on Afro-American funerary art.

C. Malcolm Watkins, of the Smithsonian Institution, was especially generous with his incomparable knowledge of American ceramics. The technical statement about the firing of Afro-Carolinian sculpture is borrowed from his expertise and that of his wife, who is an accomplished potter. Jessie McNab, of the Metropolitan Museum, considerably sharpened my knowledge of the possibilities of English influences on the South Carolinian ceramic. Finally, Jules David Prown was kind enough to bring the Fayetteville sculpture to my attention, negotiate the gift of study photographs of Afro-Carolinian stoneware for students at Yale (including the author), and for many useful comments about the mode of presentation of the present

work. And my wife will know who has most safeguarded my enthusiasm for the glory of the Afro-American artistic heritage.

R.F.T.

New Haven, April 1969

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