PRISON CULTURE:
USING MUSIC AS DATA

DISSERTATION

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By

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Simon Dinitz
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To My Parents, My Children,
and My Granddaughter
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In spite of United States prison reforms over the last century, prisons are still "Houses of Darkness" (Orland, 1975), and today's prisoners still experience the same basic pains of imprisonment as their predecessors (Mitford, 1984; Irwin, 1980; Johnson and Toch, 1982; and Johnson, 1987). These "pains"—deprivations of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy, and personal security (Sykes, 1958)—continue to be a major problem for inmates even with recent changes spurred by court interpretations of the First, Fourth, Sixth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Nowhere are these pains and deprivations more evident than in the musical expressions of the incarcerated. Prison music as a form of expressive culture offers a substantial data base which sociologists have previously ignored when discussing deprivations of the imprisoned. This study, then, will examine the music written and sung by the
incarcerated to determine if the inmates' perceptions of their experiences of incarceration have changed.

Framed by the lack of change position of prison critics, this work traces the uses, forms, and themes of prison music in relation to imprisonment. It is the contention of this study that a historical analysis of prison songs from the early 1800s up to and including the 1980s will illustrate that from the inmates' perceptions, prisons have not changed a great deal. Prison music includes both songs written and/or sung by the incarcerated and also those songs written after release. This work, then, uses music as data in order to understand the experience of incarceration from the inmates' point of view. The use of music as data provides a novel and creative way of understanding the incarceration experience for both black and white inmates from traditional plantation prison systems in the South and industrial prisons of the North. Additionally, the use of this form of cultural expression may possibly lead to new and interesting insights about varied aspects of the prison experience.

This research both uses and extends our understanding of the inmates' experience. First of all, the use of music as a vehicle for understanding inmates' perceptions
of incarceration places this work in the inmate subculture body of research. Furthermore, music as a cultural form is also used to weigh the relative merits of the two opposing models explaining the inmate subculture: importation and deprivation. Until recently, prisons have been racially segregated for Anglo- and Afro-Americans. Using these two major distinctions, this work then further elucidates the picture of inmates' adaptations and reactions to prison based upon their cultural heritages. Consistent with historical and recent research findings, this study assumes that these two groups express themselves differently in relationship to the conditions of imprisonment (Carroll, 1974; Harrah-Conforth, 1984; Jackson, 1972; and Lomax and Lomax, 1934). After all, the situation of blacks in the United States in general, and in prisons in particular, has always been different from that of whites. Finally, although there exists an expansive body of inmate subculture literature, the black inmate had generally been ignored until the 1970s. Based on the collections of folklorists in the South, this research also attempts a reconstruction of the early black inmate subculture from the earliest days of their incarceration in the United States.

An extensive review of the historical literature plus personal interviews with inmate composers of the 1980s
provides the most far-reaching and complete collection of music written and sung by the imprisoned to date. This research goes beyond prior research in the following ways:

(1) It combines traditional folk music, commercially recorded music, and unpublished songs of the 1980s prisoners.

(2) It also combines various folklorists' collections of Afro-American prison songs before the 1970s (Lomax, 1939; Seeger, 1951; Oster, 1969; and Jackson (1972).

(3) It includes music of all forms, such as ballads, blues, rockabilly, reggae, country, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues, written by prisoners in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily from northern prisons but including some southern prisons as well.

(4) It encompasses all forms of prison songs written and performed by both black and white inmates, reflecting Anglo- and Afro-American traditions.

(5) It is the first sociological analysis using music to explain the experience of incarceration over time.

In sum, this historical review of black and white inmates' music questions what this form of cultural
expression can reveal about the inmates' world view over time. Before examining the data, it will be helpful to consider the foundations for using music as an expression of culture and to have an overview of the inmate subculture.

Music as an Expression of Culture

The study of music has a dignified history in the social sciences in general and in sociology in particular. There is evidence that the first language was sung, that human beings' first expressions by voice were expressed through music. According to Franklin (1982:82-85), human beings are intimately tied to rhythm. It has been widely observed that in many cultures the individual rhythm of the heartbeat was tied to another by singing and chanting together. Many and probably most preliterate societies were known to be song makers. Moreover, every individual of these preliterate societies-- men, women, and children-- composed their own songs. Individuals, even in some literate societies, exhibited love of poetry and song as one of the most common characteristics of their culture. The African slaves who were brought to America

1 This section is based on H. Bruce Franklin's discussion of the origins of poetry and song (1982:82-85).
came from cultures in which song was a daily activity, part of labor, love, ritual, and entertainment.

Folklore, from its very inception, has always been interested in examining the expression of people's cultures, and music of the folk has always been a bona fide object of study. It is through the lyrics of songs that history, tradition, and the content of the norms, values, and beliefs of a society have been passed on from generation to generation. The modern subfield of ethnomusicology studies music as data to understand different cultures, preliterate as well as literate.

In the area of sociology, the founding fathers or classical theorists also recognized music as an object of study. Certainly conflict theorists see music differently than structural functionalists or order theorists. However, from Dilthey, Simmel, and Weber to more contemporary critical theorists, music in both structure/form and content/lyrics is perceived of as an expression of a nation, culture, and subculture. For Dilthey,

... experiences in life are expressed through musical forms [and] ... the real understanding of a nation's life [culture] has to be sought through scientific analysis of the ... music of a particular people (Etzkorn, 1973:5).

For Simmel,
music is a human expression with forms appropriate to various social settings. The meaning of music is treated as an integral feature of its respective social setting. [Moreover, for Simmel], the artist who creates music is so strongly integrated in his society that his musical creations are true expressions of the essence of his country (Etzkorn, 1973:13).

The "Wesen" (essence) of music and society are treated as one unit by Simmel.

In The Rational and Social Foundations of Music (1921:1i), Weber claims that music in the Western world has undergone a "transformation of the process of musical production into a calculable affair operating with known means, effective instruments, and understandable rules." Music is supposed to be an arena of expressive flexibility, but similar to other institutions in society, music is also being subjected to the process of rationalization. As society is becoming rationalized, music as part of society is also becoming rationalized. Therefore, for Weber also, music is part and parcel of society.

Contemporary theorists are prone to criticize much of contemporary music. However, unlike Adorno who thought only Schopenhauer's atonal music was an active vehicle for criticism and change, John Shepherd et al (1977), "sharing a common critical stance to their subject matter," agree that "music is an aspect of a wider social
reality" and that ". . . any particular type of music can only be understood in terms of the criteria of the group or society which makes and appreciates that music" (Shepherd, 1977:1). Beyond developing what Shepherd (1972:2) calls a "valid social theory of music," the various authors in Whose Music? also criticize ". . . the distinctions between high culture, folk culture and mass or popular culture" (Shepherd, 1977:4). Music of any group, then, may be considered a valid object of sociological inquiry and beyond that is important in its own right.

**Functions of Music**

Historically, music has been used as an expressive mode of communication. In the Aristotelian sense, music can operate as a psychological catharsis; ". . . rhythm and harmony sink deep into the recesses of the soul" (Plato, 1945:90). Words of songs often serve as a vehicle for stating that which cannot be communicated in ordinary conversation (Simmel, 1882; Jackson, 1972). Fantasy and escape from intolerable conditions can also be achieved through the words and rhythms of music. Finally and maybe most fundamental to the human condition, music serves as a rhythm for work. Many of these general functions of music will be exhibited in the historical examination of music
of the incarcerated. Moreover, some functions will be seen to be particularly appropriate for the prisoner because of the incarceration experience. Additionally, it must be realized that the music of the incarcerated did not begin with the acknowledgement and interest of folklorists in the early part of this century. If one perceives prisoners as a group of oppressed people, some of the earliest representations of such music may be found in the psalms and lamentations of the Old Testament in the Bible. Certainly the Jews were not physically locked up behind bars; however, they were kept as captive slaves or as marginals in exile. Their lamentations express themes of frustration, deprivation, and questioning about their powerless position in this world.

Furthermore, it is possible that some of the very first criminals may have been incarcerated for playing and/or singing forbidden music. It is not unusual in the history of societies that the powerful classes have held certain instruments and music to be of more value than others. Plato's plan for the New Republic carefully laid out the types of music which would be allowed. He was concerned that any other kind of music might lead the youth into trouble or deviant behavior (Plato, 1945:88-90). Also, during more recent American history in the
South, there were laws that expressly prohibited the slaves from "... using and keeping drums, horns or other loud instruments which may call together or give sign or notice to one another" (Southern, 1983:82). Additionally, slaves were forbidden to sing certain spirituals that sounded like songs of protest to their plantation owners. In fact, for singing "We Shall Be Free," Thomas Higginson noted that "... the Negroes had been put in jail in Georgetown, S.C. at the outbreak of the Rebellion" (Greenway, 1971:78).

In summary, music as an expression of a culture, specifically of a minority or powerless subculture group, has historical, theoretical, and empirical support.

**Music as an Expression of Inmate Subculture**

Although there is ample popular and academic literature dealing with music as an expression of a group's culture, there is little published sociological research which examines music over time as an expression of the inmate subculture. Folklorists who have collected music of the incarcerated have done so in a limited context. John A. Lomax (1939), Pete Seeger (1951), Harry Oster (1969), and Bruce Jackson (1972) all attempted to collect folksongs in the narrow definition of "folk," i.e., as that which is passed on from generation to
generation by word of mouth only. They were looking specifically for music representative of the black country blues tradition (Oster, 1969), of the black southern tradition (Lomax, 1939; Lomax, 1951; Seeger, 1951), and of the Afro-American work music of the Texas prison system (Jackson, 1972).

The folklorists' work was both more limited in scope and more general than this research. This work examines songs written and sung by prisoners while incarcerated. It may be seen as going beyond the folklorists' research in at least four ways:

1. It includes not only traditional folk music but also published and commercially recorded music.
2. It seeks to organize the Afro-American music of prisoners before the 1970s.
3. It also includes music of all types which has been written by prisoners of the 1970s and 1980s in both northern and southern prisons.
4. It examines the themes of all music written and sung by the incarcerated, both black and white, over time.
**Inmate Subculture**

The second major area of research to which this work contributes is the inmate subculture. Historically, laypeople and academics alike have been intrigued with what really goes on inside "the walls." Much previous work concentrates on the "Weltanschauung" (worldview) of the prison and how the inmate subculture arises (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Irwin, 1970; Carrol, 1974; and Cardoza-Freeman, 1984). This study adds to this body of literature in that it uses music as an indicator of the prisoners' worldviews. This work also goes beyond the existing body of literature in that music of the incarcerated is examined not only at different times in history but also from different types of prisons. Prisons are not all the same, even at the same historical points in time. It is well known that most northern prisons have always been much different than most southern prisons.

Furthermore, this research involves an empirical evaluation of the importation and deprivation models of the inmate subculture. Application of these two opposing theoretical models helps clarify the prison subculture as described in both models. (These two models will be discussed at length in the review of the literature, Chapter IV.)
The Black Inmate Subculture

This work also contributes to the black inmate subculture literature. Beginning with Donald Clemmer's *Prison Community* in 1940, researchers have attempted to portray and explain the inmate subculture. However, not until 1974 with Leo Carroll's *Hacks, Blacks and Cons* did black ethnicity become an important delineation for sociological inquiry of the prisons. Not unlike other disciplines, mainstream white sociologists had previously paid little attention to blacks in general and almost no attention to them in prison.

Early research about blacks in the United States had been limited to problems in race relations: integration in the military, discrimination in business and industry, residential segregation, school segregation, and urban violence of the 1960s. According to Leo Carroll (1974: 1-2), "Research in race relations tends to be guided by a melioristic interest . . . As the spotlight of public attention has illuminated one problem after another the focus of research has shifted."

Various other speculations exist for the lack of attention to black inmates: biases of white researchers, segregation of the black inmates so that they had no power or status in the inmate subculture, and most likely a
reflection of the overall societal discrimination and prejudice which in turn affected both the personal curiosity of researchers and the academic models which were used to examine the prison subculture. As research in race relations in general was guided by a problem orientation, until blacks became a "problem" in prison in the 1960s, researchers were not interested in them. So as the numbers and power of black prisoners increased in the 1960s and prisons were court-ordered to integrate black and white inmates, black inmates became a "problem."

Although the black prisoner was mostly ignored prior to the 1960s, the collections of folksongs already noted provide data for an attempt at a reconstruction of the black inmates' experiences of incarceration. Through the vehicle of the words of songs sung and written by black inmates, an expansion of the experience of incarceration for black inmates from the early part of this century through the 1960s is constructed.

METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Humanistic Methodology

Theoretically and empirically, this research is guided by the humanistic school of sociological thought.
Humanists such as Max Weber and more contemporary symbolic interactionists assume that human behavior is something unique and different from animal behavior. For Weber, the object of sociological study is an interpretive understanding of social action. Social action includes "... all human behavior when in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it" (Weber, 1947:89). Social behavior, then, is more than that which is observable. It consists also of the particular meanings and motivations behind the observable actions (Weber, 1947:88-104). These meanings, however, are not purely psychological motivations but social meanings learned in interaction with one another. What methods, then, are appropriate for finding out about human social behavior? For the humanistic school, it is primarily a process of interpretive understanding or "verstehen" which enables one to understand both covert and overt elements of human social behavior.

For the verifiable accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon, it is a great help to be able to put one's self imaginatively in the place of the actor and thus sympathetically to participate in his experience (Weber, 1947:90).

More contemporary symbolic interactionists such as Charles Horton Cooley, Herbert Blumer, and Norman Denzin also emphasize a "verstehen" or interpretive method of understanding social behavior. Cooley (1937:7) defines
"sympathetic introspection"

... as putting ... [oneself] into intimate contact with various sorts of persons and allowing them to awake in himself a life similar to their own, which he afterwards, to the best of his ability, recalls and describes. In this way he [the researcher] is more or less able to understand ... any phase of human nature not wholly alien to his own.

Additionally, Blumer (1978:101) insists that the "... [researcher] must take the role of the acting unit whose behavior he is studying. ... the process has to be seen from the standpoint of the acting unit." And finally, Denzin (1978:60) agrees that the investigator must "... view human conduct from the point of view of those he is studying-- 'take the role of the acting other in concrete situations'--." Hence an understanding of human conduct comes not only from observing behavior but also an understanding of the inner phase of human acts. One must put oneself in "the place of the other" (in this case, the ideal typical inmate) in order to understand the behaviors of the other. By abstracting out the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the ideal typical actor and immersing oneself in those attitudes, values, and beliefs, an understanding of the typical actor's experience or "Weltanschauung" is achieved.

This research then, consistent with the humanistic school of thought, assumes that it is important not only
to study the phenomena of the songs of the incarcerated as they exist in print and on recordings but also to go beyond and find out why inmates use music and what meanings the words of the songs have for them. In order to effectively "put oneself in the place of the other," one must immerse oneself in the particular historical time and place of the actor. To gain this understanding of the ideal typical inmate, it has been necessary not only to examine the words of the songs and to listen to recordings of music, but also to conduct an extensive examination of the historical documents written by and about inmates.

**Prison Music as an Ideal Type**

Consistent with Weberian analysis, prison music is considered an ideal type. An ideal type, as stated by Weber, is:

... formed by the one sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (Weber, 1949:90).

As will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of this research, prison music has several distinguishing characteristics. First, it is written and/or sung by individuals who are or have been
incarcerated. Second, the thematic content of the lyrics generally relates to "pains of imprisonment." However, not all the "pains of imprisonment" as described by Gresham Sykes are reflected in the music of the incarcerated. It is mainly the lack of heterosexual relationships, the separation from family and friends, the lack of freedom and justice, and the lack of autonomy which are evident in this music.

Most of the songs which arise from the incarceration experience deal with phenomena which the inmates do not have, that which they have lost as a result of being imprisoned. According to Bruce Jackson (1974:xvi), the songs are about:

... darkness or absence or lostness or deprivation
... The language of the songs is highly concrete, but the themes are not; the themes are negatives: things like unlove and unfreedom and unimportance.

In particular, the prison music of the black inmates deals with protest, both implicit and explicit, and the lack of justice for the black man and woman, not only within the criminal justice system but also within the American system as a whole.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that although the structure and words of prison songs may sound similar to songs created in the free world, they are, in fact, different. It is not argued that the prison songs are
different in kind, but by reason of the context of incarceration, they are different in degree. It is the lack of alternatives to the absence of loved ones, lost loves, and the lack of freedom and justice which is expressed in the music of the incarcerated.

In summary, both theoretical and historical justifications exist for a humanistic examination of the music of the incarcerated over time.

In order to meet the various objectives of this research, this dissertation is divided into the following chapters. Chapter II will describe the specific empirical methodologies consistent with the Humanistic school of thought which were used to gather data for this work. In order to place the music of the incarcerated in a historical context, Chapter III will describe the history of imprisonment as punishment in the United States, emphasizing the changing philosophical goals of incarceration and the resulting changes in the conditions of incarceration. As music is considered an expression of culture, an overview of the inmate subculture research is presented in Chapter IV. Since American prisons have always been predominantly populated by the lower socioeconomic classes, both black and white, music of the incarcerated arises out of these Afro-American and Anglo-American cultural groups. Because the musical expressions
of these two groups differ in structure and some thematic content, there are two historical chapters, one covering Anglo-American songs and one covering Afro-American songs. Since the earliest places of imprisonment in the United States were reserved for the white male, a historical overview of Anglo-American songs of the incarcerated will be presented first in Chapter V. Chapter VI presents the historical overview of Afro-American music of the imprisoned and what these songs have to say about the experiences of incarceration for the black inmate up to and including the 1960s. These two chapters emphasize the differences and similarities in the functions and themes of the songs for these two groups. The 1980s collection of prison songs is presented as a microcosm of music in the contemporary prison system in Chapter VII. In this final substantive chapter, the styles, themes, and functions of contemporary prison music are described. Additionally, the songs of contemporary prison writers are compared to earlier songs of the incarcerated. Chapter VIII summarizes the similarities and differences of music of the incarcerated, both Afro-American and Anglo-American, over time. This chapter portrays a picture of the black inmate subculture previous to the 1960s. Finally, questions for future research are posed.
CHAPTER II
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the specific empirical methods used to examine the music of the imprisoned over time and explores what that music has to say about the experience of incarceration for the inmate from the inmate's perspective. In order to fulfill these objectives, this work uses a multidimensional research strategy.

As this research is an effort to use another indicator to explore the inmate's "Zeitgeist," or to put oneself in the place of the inmate and understand the experiences of incarceration from the actor's/inmate's perspective, only those songs written by inmates and ex-convicts and/or thematically inspired by the prison experience are used. Logically, then, the major focus of this research is on the content of the songs or the lyrics of prison music. However, the structure/type of the music is also considered, as the particular structure of the music can be traced to the cultural heritage of the
inmate/musician. Historically, prison music arises out of two main cultural traditions of the lower socio-economic classes in the United States: Afro-American and Anglo-American. In addition, the structure of the music from these two traditions is rooted in two distinctly different cultural heritages: West Africa and Western Europe, respectively.

Prison music embraces traditional folk songs, commercially recorded songs, and those songs written and composed by individual inmates who may or may not wish to have their work published. The folk music which has been used for this research is that music which has been passed on from generation to generation through oral tradition, that which has been recorded on records and tapes, and that which has been transcribed and preserved in published and unpublished documents. Finally, prison music includes contemporary prison music collected especially for this research. Through personal interviews conducted in two prisons in the South and four prisons in a northern midwestern state, prison music of the 1980s has also been included.

Since there is no existing sampling frame for the universe of all songs written by inmates and ex-convicts over time, the data for this research were collected
through both a purposive sampling strategy and direct and indirect snowball techniques. Both the nature and potential sources of the historical and contemporary data demanded such research strategies. Yet the specific applications of these research strategies and the nature of the data sources, both historical and contemporary, differ enough from one another to indicate a division of the following discussion into two major sections: historical and contemporary.

For the purposes of this study, the historical data are the data which date from the early 1800s through the 1970s. The term "contemporary" applies only to the data which were collected from imprisoned inmates in 1984.

The following section includes a discussion of the specific applications of both purposive and direct and indirect snowball sampling techniques as they apply to this study. Additionally, a description of the nature and sources of the data are also included. Finally, since the major data sources for this research come from the field of folklore, relevant terms and concepts from this discipline are defined.
HISTORICAL DATA

Sample

Considerable time and effort were expended in collecting the data for this study. The collection process entailed two separate out-of-state visits, one to the Archives of Folk Song at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and one to the Country Music Foundation Library in Nashville, Tennessee. At least forty hours of research was conducted at each location.

The data for the historical section of this research are comprised of both folk songs and commercially recorded songs. The earliest prison music, both Afro-American and Anglo-American, comes from primary and secondary sources collected by folklorists and preserved on tapes, on records and in published and unpublished documents. Since the defining of the conceptual universe of prison music, i.e., the discovery that much of the earliest available prison music has been classified as folk songs, has been a difficult task, it is essential to first discuss this process in detail. The following discussion, therefore, will include the process by which both purposive and direct and indirect snowball sampling techniques yielded the data for this study.
Logically, one would think that the research of "prison music" would be a simple affair. After all, everyone knows that many country musicians such as Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash have been locked up and have written songs about their incarceration experiences. Furthermore, an even older prison musical tradition comes out of the black experience in the United States. As Franklin (1982:107-108) notes,


Sadly, the lyrics of some of the above songs have still not been located after three years of inquiry. Although the Library of Congress (LC) classification system does include a listing of prison songs and music, not one book in any library in four different states over a three-year period has been found with this LC designation. Not even the Country Music Foundation Library in Nashville, Tennessee had a card catalogue subject heading of "prison music." Only the Library of Congress' Motion Picture,
Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division had a subject index of "prison songs," and that is a catalogue of recordings only, not books.

However, a search of various computerized data bases from education, the behavioral sciences, and the humanities finally revealed *Wake Up Dead Man: Afro-American Worksongs from Texas Prisons*, by Bruce Jackson (1972), a folklorist. Through this initial source, Jackson's bibliography and discography then led to the large collection of Afro-American and Anglo-American folk songs gathered by folklorists in southern prisons during the 1920s and 1930s. The key that opened the door to "prison songs" has been "folk songs." Much of the historical data for this work, then, was obtained by examining every publication possible of the folklorists who are known to have collected folk songs in prisons. It was necessary to examine all publications, because although folklorists have published many volumes which include songs collected from prisoners, these works are most often categorized by units of analysis pertinent to the field of folklore: folk songs, ballads, country blues, and work songs. Fortunately, folklore methodological strategies dictate that the source of the data be documented. Therefore, such citations as "...
an eighteen-year-old black girl in prison for murder sang the tune and the first stanza of these blues" (Lomax and Lomax, 1934:196) and ". . . as sung by Iron Head, an habitual criminal, imprisoned on the Central State Farm near Sugarland, Texas" (Lomax and Lomax, 1934:245) led to the voluminous folk song data which is used in this dissertation. Furthermore, Jackson's discography (1972) also led to many recordings which included the term "prison songs" and thus also provided data for this research.

Many of the folk songs collected by folklorists in the 1920s and 1930s have been transferred from the original tapes and cylinders to record albums produced by the Library of Congress, Archives of Folk Song. Specialty recording houses such as Rounder Records, Folkways, and Prestige have also preserved many early folk songs collected in prisons. Transcriptions of these songs and an examination of the slip notes and album cover notes accompanying the records have also provided useful data. Additionally, primary sources consisting of the actual taped recordings (Jackson, 1964) and word-for-word transcripts of the field notes from southern recording expeditions by John and Ruby Lomax (1939) and by Peter and Toshi Seeger and John A. Lomax (1951) have also been examined. Moreover, previously unavailable data collected
by Lawrence Gellert in the South in the early 1930s has been made available by Bruce Harrah-Conforth. Numerous pieces of Gellert's songs from Harrah-Conforth's unpublished master's thesis (1984) are also included as data for the Afro-American songs of the incarcerated. These combined collections have yielded data representing incarceration experiences on traditional plantation-type prisons, jails, work camps, and chain gangs, from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

In addition to the folklore data, commercial recordings of more recent songs by inmates have also been used for this research. These recordings have been located through the usual methods of library research in addition to personal interviews and written communication with such notable ex-convict/songwriters as Johnny Cash and David Allan Coe. Here again, however, only one publication at the Country Music Foundation Library included a chapter about prison songs (Horstman, 1975). It has taken an examination of the autobiographical accounts of famous ex-convict musicians to find the exact songs which were written as a result of the incarceration experience. Certain prison employees who have worked with inmate musicians in both Texas and Tennessee prisons were
also contacted and have contributed data for this study. In addition, inmates who were interviewed for the contemporary section of this research often referred the researcher to particular popular songs that had been written and composed by inmates. Finally, during the three years this work has been in progress, friends, colleagues, and even the husband of the typist of this dissertation have contributed information about "this prison song I heard, that I think you can use for your research." Thus, a combination of a purposive sampling strategy and direct and indirect snowball techniques have yielded the historical data for this dissertation.

**Definition of Terms**

Since the data for the historical section of this research includes both folk songs and commercially recorded songs, it is essential to discuss how folk songs differ from more contemporary commercial songs.

*Folk Songs.* According to Bill Malone (1975:3), "... the problem of folk definition is a complex and controversial one," and even among folklorists the crucial criteria of the folk song are in dispute. It is not important, however, for the purpose of this research to engage in this dispute. It is only necessary to give a few basic, commonly agreed upon criteria which will enable
the reader to understand how folk songs from prisons are justifiable data for this research, in addition to how folk songs differ from commercial music.

In general, three common criteria are important in the discussion of folk songs. It is essentially a question of form, of process, and of context or milieu (de Caro and Jordan, 1980:7). First, folk songs tend to conform to certain traditional forms and patterns in the structure of the song. The folk singer, even though in some ways innovative, is oriented towards repetition of old styles and themes. Folk songs are often described as tradition-based songs in that the past is important in controlling or influencing what is sung in the present. Tradition controls the structure, theme, and style of the song. In considering the problem of folk music, folk "style" must be stressed as well as folk "song." That is, the content or lyrics of the song may change through the years, but in the style of its performance and its basic construction it remains the same.

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1 The following explication of folk song criteria is based on the discussion by de Caro and Jordan in Louisiana Traditional Crafts; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.
For example, a common type of folk song is the blues. Although the blues are often as difficult to define as the folk song, a common structure of the blues is a three-line stanza with all lines rhyming. There is usually one line that repeats and rhymes, followed by a longer line that rhymes with the preceding two and expresses a judgment, clarification, or resolution (Greenway, 1972:82-83). Throughout time, this particular structure has denoted the song as blues.

Second, there is the traditional process by which the techniques of singing and the contents of the song are transmitted. In the ideal definition of folk song, the transmission or learning process is aural, from person to person, group to group, and generation to generation. The learning process, then, is informal rather than a formal one preserved in books, classrooms, or the mass media (de Caro and Jordan, 1980:7). Folk songs are learned through imitation and/or by example. It is important to note here that the role of the mass media, i.e., recordings, print, and video, in the transmission of folk songs is one which is difficult to eliminate in the twentieth century, and some contemporary scholars do not insist on the criteria of only aural transmission (Mullen, 1984).
Finally, there is the folk or for purposes of this research the subcultural milieu or context. Folk songs are not the products of academically trained musicians. Instead, they are produced in communities where older, traditionally sanctioned ways of life are still normative (de Caro and Jordan, 1980:7). Granted, it may be difficult to imagine the prison community as one in which older, traditionally sanctioned ways of life are carried on. However, according to Inez Cardoza-Freeman (1984:24), the

... prison is a folk community by every definition: it is a culture by which the values, beliefs, attitudes and traditions of the group are passed on by word of mouth or by imitation from one person to another and from one generation to the next.

In addition, it is this criterion that is specifically at the heart of the deprivation model of the inmate subculture. (A complete discussion of the deprivation model of the inmate subculture will be covered in Chapter IV.)

Folk songs are also ideally made for a particular group's use or entertainment and to suit local needs and standards. Folklorists in general define a folk song, then, as "... a piece received aurally by listeners and singers which is accepted by them and which is also altered in process of movement over time" (Green, 1972:5).
The song is transmitted by members of a folk society and must be performed in a given (folk) style.

Folk music is often referred to as music which is alive. It is changed constantly to suit its audience and to serve as a cultural expression for the particular group which is listening. Old plots are infused with current dates and events. Therefore, when folk music is played and sung in prison by inmates, it has been appropriated by the folk community of prisoners. It is reflective of the cultural milieu of the inmates and the prison situation. Folk music that has been brought into and sung in the prison becomes, then, the music of the incarcerated.

**Commercial Music.** Commercial music, on the other hand, is that which has been recorded for purposes of distribution and sale to a wider public audience. Commercial music is that which is heard on the radio and/or television and is popularized. As is the case with most categorization, the lines between folk songs and commercial songs do sometimes blur. For instance, in the early days of the recording industry, many record companies recorded folk songs of the South in order to sell a product to the southern rural immigrants of the North. Sometimes these folk songs become popular with a wider public audience than that for which they were originally intended. For instance, Vernon Dahlert's
"Prisoner's Song," one of the most successful commercial recordings ever, is known to be of folk origin. Leadbelly's "Irene Goodnight," also of folk origin, rose to the top of the popular music chart sales in the 1950s.

However, the primary purpose of this study is not necessarily to differentiate folk songs from commercial music. These definitions are included for both an understanding of how the data have been handled and of the concepts and terminology used in this work.

This research also includes sub-groupings of folk songs -- ballads, criminal goodnights, and broadside ballads -- and commercially recorded popular songs -- country music, the blues, rockabilly, and reggae. These additional terms will be defined as they are introduced later in the text.

CONTEMPORARY PRISON MUSIC

Sample

For purposes of this study, contemporary prison music refers to those songs written by inmates who were incarcerated in 1984. Not surprisingly, the types of songs found in prisons of the 1980s represent almost every style of music played outside the walls. Everything from
old-time country, white man's blues, rock and roll, acid rock, rockabilly, the blues, gospel, contemporary black music, and even a song with a reggae beat is found in the 1980s collection.

Inmates who write prison songs were located with the assistance of those connected with prisoners in any capacity. Letters, phone calls, and personal requests were made to knowledgable prison employees known to the researcher. Contacts were made with prison education personnel, recreation personnel, and deputies in charge of treatment. Finally, the interviews with prisoners/songwriters at a southern prison were arranged through the cooperation of the ex-director of the music program at that prison.

In order to protect the anonymity of respondents of this section of the research, the researcher did not make any initial personal request of any inmate. Key contact people were asked to circulate the researcher's request and to speak to any inmates who had written songs while incarcerated. Educational personnel made announcements in their classes about this study. Some prisons put notices of this request on bulletin boards, and others informally communicated the request. Finally, during the time the researcher was teaching in a women's prison, the researcher told the inmate/students about the research,
and they passed on the request to other inmates in the institution. No potential inmate respondent's name was given to the researcher without the inmate's permission. All inmates who contributed data to this research did so voluntarily. In no case did this researcher single out any known inmate/songwriter and request personally that the inmate participate in this study.

Methods

The primary source of the contemporary data for this research comes from personal face-to-face interviews guided by a short, semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix). Additional data were obtained through personal correspondence with inmates who had been personally interviewed previously.

Initially, it was proposed that prison songs would be collected through questionnaires distributed by prison personnel to those inmates who would be willing to participate in the study. After initial personal interviews with inmates in southern prisons, questionnaires were mailed to the respondents. Not one inmate either returned the completed questionnaire or corresponded with this researcher in any capacity. Therefore, it was decided that all information needed for
this research would best be collected at the time of the face-to-face interview and that mailed questionnaires with no personal contact would yield little if any data at all.

The questionnaire was divided into four major parts: (1) characteristics of the music—type and theme; (2) the inmate/songwriter's experiences relevant to songwriting; (3) characteristics and type of prison in which the inmate was incarcerated when the music was written; and (4) general demographic information about the inmate. The questions were designed to allow and encourage the respondents to express freely anything they thought would be relevant to the process of writing and singing music in prison. For an understanding of what the lyrics of songs written by inmates have to say about the prison experience, the inmates were asked why they wrote a particular song and what the writing of that song meant for them. In order to obtain this information, the following questions were routinely asked:

(1) Tell me about this song.
(2) Why did you write this song?
   (2a) Was it for your own pleasure?
   (2b) Was it in order to get it published?
(3) How would you describe the main theme of this particular piece of music?
(4) Please tell me in your own words what the main point of the lyrics is.

Additionally, inmates were asked about pre-prison and/or prison experiences relevant to songwriting in general and particularly to songwriting in prison. The following questions were asked in order to obtain this information:

(1) How many years have you been writing music?
(2) Did you write music before you were incarcerated?
(3) If you only started writing music in prison, what motivated you to start writing?
(4) Was there something about being in prison that helped you to write?
(5) Was there anything that interfered with your writing?
(6) What was that?

The preceding questions were generally used as guides in directing the inmates' answers. Often not all the specific questions were necessary, and a simple "Tell me about your songwriting experiences," "Tell me about this song," and "Please explain in your own words what it is about and why you wrote it" generally yielded all pertinent information needed for this research. It didn't take much probing, if any, to encourage inmates to speak at length about their musical accomplishments. The non-
threatening nature of this research resulted in extraordinarily good cooperation. If any problems arose, it was in the difficulty of terminating the interview. Requests for copies of the song lyrics they had written were also made. Finally, blank tapes were provided for those inmates who had the facilities to record their music but could not do so at the time of the interview.

Inmates who were interested in participating in this research were told about the nature of the study, what was to be discussed in the interview, and the approximate length of the interview. They were encouraged to tell the researcher if they had any questions before deciding whether to participate (see copy of oral presentation in Appendix). Upon deciding to participate, they were asked to sign a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix).

The tapes of the personal interviews and written communication are permanent records which can be traced to the respondents. All inmates interviewed in 1984 were given code numbers which were used for all transcribing and analysis activities. Any names which appeared on the tapes or in written correspondence were removed by the researcher, and code numbers were substituted. Any proper names which appeared on the tapes and/or written
correspondence were identified by initials in the finished transcripts. The list of names of respondents and corresponding code numbers have been retained by the researcher, who has sole access to that list.

Source and Nature of Data

The data for this research come primarily from four prisons in a northern midwestern state, and a few songs were collected in two southern prisons. One of the northern prisons is a women's prison; all the other prisons are men's prisons. Therefore, the majority of these songs describe the male experience of incarceration. Only four female inmates contributed data for the contemporary section of this research.

All of the prisons were medium security facilities at the time of the interviews, except for the women's prison which was classified as minimum to maximum security, as most women's prisons usually are categorized. In addition, one of the northern prisons housed primarily young first offenders of age 18-30, convicted of less serious offenses.

A total of over one hundred songs were collected from thirty-seven inmates, both black and white. The breakdown by race is approximately 50/50, which is consistent with the current national description of prison populations.
Most of the inmates were in their twenties to early thirties, with one inmate in his late fifties.

Inmate/songwriters of this study represent all categories of offenders, from first time offenders, to state-raised youth who have served a good portion of their lives since adolescence in a state facility, to those inmates serving life. One white inmate in a southern prison had spent thirty-four years in prison at the time of the interview. He had first been imprisoned in 1947 and was presently serving a 99-year term for first-degree murder. Another black inmate from a southern prison had been imprisoned at fourteen and by 1984 had spent fourteen of his thirty-two years incarcerated. On the other hand, one of the men at the prison for young, first-time offenders was serving a flat 18-month sentence, and another said he was serving eight and one-half months to one year.

The offenses for which the inmates had been convicted and incarcerated also varied, including first-degree murder, rape, grand theft, burglary, robbery, and drug trafficking.

In general, the distribution of race, ages, offenses, and sentences of the inmate/songwriters of this research are fairly consistent with the descriptions of the
national prison population. Since the sample of this research was not drawn randomly, one cannot say that these inmates and their songs are representative of the prison population as a whole. On the other hand, there is no evidence to say that these songs are not representative.

ANALYSIS

Historically, American prisons have been predominantly populated by the lower socio-economic classes, both black and white. Logically, then, music of the incarcerated arises out of these two Afro-American and Anglo-American groups. Therefore, the following examination of the history of music of the incarcerated will be guided by these two main divisions. Consistent with Thomas' explanation (1977), which says that the inmate subculture arises out of a combination of the importation and deprivation models of imprisonment, this work illustrates that music of the incarcerated is also a combination of the cultural orientations which the inmates bring to prison from outside "the walls" and the particular conditions of the incarceration experience. Therefore, the music of imprisoned blacks and whites will exhibit both differences and similarities to one another over time.
Even though both Anglo-American and Afro-American inmates of the lower socioeconomic classes share most of the same material and economic conditions in the United States, particularly the real possibility of arrest, conviction and imprisonment, not only the roots but also many of the contemporary musical expressions still differ from one another, both structurally and thematically. Since the blacks arrived in the United States,

... they have engaged in wide-spread musical exchanges ... with whites among whom they lived, yet throughout the centuries of slavery and long after emancipation their song style, with its overriding antiphony, its group nature, its pervasive functionality, its improvisational character, its strong relationship in performance to dance and bodily movement and expression remained closer to the musical styles and performances of West Africa and Afro-American music of the West Indies and South America than to the musical styles of Western Europe (Levine, 1977:6).

On the other hand, according to Alan Lomax, "... 'the white folk pattern in America still resembles the familiar folk song style of Western Europe more than it does that of its Afro-American neighbors'" (Malone, 1968:12). Structurally, then, it appears that the musical roots and contemporary expressions of black and white music differ from one another.

Another major difference between the music of black and white inmates is one based on an individual vs. group identification which is expressed in the themes of the
music. Many analysts of black cultural expressions suggest that black poetry, literature, and music in the United States has always exhibited a strong consciousness of belonging to a group. Black cultural traditions often express not only a group consciousness but also a recognition of belonging to an oppressed, "enslaved" class. When blacks sing about the prison experience,

Whether or not the individual . . . artist had ever been in prison he or she sang of a condition common to a whole people. Actual imprisonment, the threat of imprisonment, and day-to-day imprisonment on the tenant farms or in the ghettos were central to the life of Black people. The blues artist who sang about prisons in the rural "juke" joints . . . was not separate from his or her Black audience and certainly was not on exhibit to them as a specimen criminal or ex-prisoner. (That is . . . a role in which white ex-prisoner artists were and are often cast.) (Franklin, 1982:108)

Therefore, Anglo-American prison music should be more likely to contain themes of individual responsibility and personal blame for criminality and the punishment of incarceration. However, since the end of the 1960s some white convicts have recognized the limited legitimate opportunities for lower socioeconomic classes in this country and "... began adopting the view that they, as a class, were treated unfairly by the law" (Irwin, 1980:7). The cultural expressions of white inmates from the 1970s on should then be reflective of this group consciousness of belonging to an oppressed class, or at least there
should be some indication from some of them of this consciousness. Anglo-American prison music of more recent decades should illustrate, therefore, a decrease in expressions of individual responsibility and blame for criminal behavior and incarceration.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

This dissertation includes various limitations and delimitations. First, it is primarily a study about the songs of male inmates. Additionally, the data for the Afro-American historical section come generally from black inmates in southern prisons. On the other hand, the data for the contemporary section come from inmates in northern prisons, with a few exceptions. However, the northern prison songs do come from both black and white inmates. Furthermore, it is recognized that inmate/songwriters may not reflect the expressions of all inmates. Finally, writing about music, using the printed page to convey meanings of phenomena which were not designed to be communicated in such a manner, certainly has its deficiencies.

This work is primarily a study about the songs of male inmates, not because it was intended to be so, but because of a lack of data about the songs of female
inmates. Many reasons exist for this dearth. First of all, women historically have been all but ignored by most academic disciplines until the last couple of decades. Only with the advent of the civil rights movement in the 1960s have academic disciplines begun to take notice of the absence of data about women at all levels of society. Criminology and the area of corrections have not been an exception in this case. Women in corrections have been ignored most often with the justification that they only comprise approximately 5% of the total imprisoned population. Moreover, the folklorists who collected folksongs in southern prisons in the early part of this century collected songs primarily from men. For example, the field notes of Alan and Ruby Lomax's southern recording trip of the late 1930s reveal only a few trips to women's prisons, and for some unaccountable reason, there are even fewer transcriptions of the songs from the female inmates. Furthermore, Harry Oster's publication about country blues does not include any women's songs at all, and of the many recordings produced from his research, only one record has any women's songs. That record includes only two songs from women. It is not that Oster didn't collect any songs from the female inmates but that he has never done anything with them. In a personal interview in the fall of 1984, Oster stated that the
women's songs collected at Angola prison in the late 1950s are still on the original tapes, which are now almost thirty years old and were not available during this research.

In addition to the limitations dictated by the lack of historical data, there are other speculations about the paucity of women's prison songs. There is the possibility that there are empirically fewer female inmate/songwriters than male inmate/songwriters. In research conducted by Duane Brown (1969:161), he notes that "... popular composers and musicians, almost to a man, are male." Certainly such a statement was not surprising in the late 1960s. Popular songwriting is one of the occupations which has traditionally been defined as a male occupation. In general, moreover, women as a cultural group in the United States have been socialized to express a much wider and different range of emotions than men have. In addition, the subculture research in women's prisons does provide evidence that informal grouping functions to provide women with emotional support. Consequently, then, women in prison have more societal support for expressing loneliness, fear, sorrow, and other similar emotions than men do. Perhaps men use songwriting as a vehicle for expressing those emotions which are not so acceptable,
either in society as a whole or in the prison community. Since women may not need the vehicle of songwriting as much as men do, there are perhaps empirically fewer female inmate/songwriters than male inmate/songwriters.

Beyond the nature of and limitations of existing data, this research includes few contemporary songs of incarcerated women. Aside from the fewer actual numbers of incarcerated women, a discussion of the interviewing arrangements and communication with the inmates about the research by prison authorities will shed some light on this lack of data.

In order to collect the 1980s data for this study, this researcher had to rely on the cooperation and good graces of many prison employees, from the superintendents to educational personnel to correctional officers. Contacts within the prison varied from personal friends to previously unknown prison administrators. Not surprisingly, the levels of cooperation varied also.

First, this researcher did not have close associates within the women's prison, even after teaching a college sociology course there. Second, the superintendent of the women's prison was annoyed that the proposal for this study had been approved by the State Department of Corrections faster than her own research proposal. Even so, such problems did not necessarily preclude obtaining
significant amounts of data. The problem appears to have occurred in the communication, or perhaps lack of communication, with inmates about the research and the actual processes of inmate movement within the prison. Prison authorities used various methods to communicate the researcher's request to the inmates. In response to their communiques, the men's prisons had a list of inmates who were willing to speak with the researcher about their songs. All the inmates in the men's prisons knew what day the researcher would be there and a general sense of what the researcher wanted to talk to them about. One prison arranged for all interested inmates to meet in the chapel, where the researcher explained the purpose of her study and what she needed from them. The response of the inmates in that prison was excellent. In the course of her visits, the researcher was able to speak to approximately fifteen inmates and collect approximately thirty pieces of music. In all the men's prisons, all interested inmates had been issued a pass to meet with the researcher, and the interviewing process generally went very smoothly. The male inmates who wished to participate had been informed of the day and time this researcher would be there, and the authorities had issued passes to all interested inmates ahead of time. Time for their
interviews had already been allocated so that no time was lost waiting for the next inmate. In fact, in one prison not enough time had been arranged for the individual interviews, and the inmates were lined up waiting.

On the other hand, the interview arrangements were not as well set up at the women's prison. A private room was set aside for the interviews, but that was all. During the process of teaching a sociology course in the women's prison the previous quarter, this researcher had discussed the study with the students. They were asked to inform any inmate/songwriters they knew about the work and to ask them if they'd be willing to participate in the study when official permission to do so was obtained. Five inmate/songwriters gave their names to the students. Arrangements were then made with the prison authorities for an interview day. However, none of the inmates were informed ahead of time that the researcher would be there. No passes were issued either, until the researcher arrived. Then the inmates were notified to appear at a certain building to meet with the person in charge. Not until they spoke with him did they know what they had been summoned for. Most of the women the researcher spoke to over a two-day period were visibly frightened by the time they had been directed to her. They had no idea what they had been summoned for and were afraid they were in trouble
about something. Furthermore, the authorities would not request the next inmate until the researcher was finished interviewing one. By the time the next inmate arrived, as much as forty-five minutes had elapsed. It therefore took two and one-half days to interview a total of five inmates. Finally, even though a private room had been arranged for the interviews, the women spoke in whispers. One inmate, when asked to sing one of her songs, was very reluctant to do so. The researcher assured her that the prison authorities had granted permission to record it. She replied, "You got to go home, I got to stay here. They all tell you one thing and lock me up next time you turn around . . . If they [prison authorities] heard that tape they'd lock me up."

The aura of fear was constant in the women's prison during the interviews, unlike the men's prisons. However, the researcher can only speculate about the reasons. In Total Institutions, Goffman discusses how the keepers maintain control by withholding information from the kept. Only in the women's prison was this control of information so evident. Secondly, research does indicate that women who are incarcerated must be protected for their own good and are often more rigidly controlled than the men. In the case of this research, such a difference was apparent.
Finally, it could be the case that women are more likely than men to express fear in front of a woman. However, male inmates have expressed anxiety to the researcher on other occasions. Gender does not seem to explain the differences in this case. It is more likely, in fact, that the women are more rigidly controlled by the administration in their normal, day-to-day activities than are the men.

Various reasons then exist for the paucity of women's songs from prison. An unquestionable lack of historical data, coupled with stricter and more rigid control of information for inmates at women's prisons, has led to a paucity of women's prison songs.

Finally, writing about music, using the printed page to convey meanings of phenomena which were not designed to be communicated in such a manner, has its limitations. Even though the focus of this research is on the lyrics and what those words convey about the incarceration experience, separating the words from the tunes results in some loss of meaning. The intended emotional expressions of the songs reflect deep feelings which are quite difficult to describe with written words only. One must really be able to listen to some of these songs once sung by prisoners on the chain gangs, on penitentiary farms, and now in the cells and recreation rooms of the more
modern prisons of the 1980s. The reader of this work is encouraged, therefore, to take advantage of the many references in this study to record albums of the inmates' songs so that this music can be heard in its context. Prison songs are such because they emerge out of the incarceration experience and can only be fully understood in that context.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this research, the following chapters trace the experience of incarceration using the lyrics of songs written by inmates as a vehicle for understanding what that experience has been like for the inmate over time. First, however, the following chapter gives an overview of the history of imprisonment in the United States and the changing philosophical goals of the institution of corrections.
CHAPTER III
THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF IMPRISONMENT

Imprisonment as a form of punishment is generally portrayed as a relatively recent and comparatively humane phenomenon. However, "It is not literally true that imprisonment for punishment, as contrasted to detention pending trial or the infliction of other punishments, was unheard of in earlier times" (Allen, 1981:12). In fact, "Places of criminal detention are ancient institutions" (Orland, 1975:13). Yet a system of long-term incarceration as a primary punishment "... is an economic indulgence, and one beyond the means of most Western societies until near the end of the eighteenth century" (Allen, 1981:12). Until that time, imprisonment generally functioned to detain the accused and pre-execution offenders and sometimes to coerce convicted offenders into paying fines. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, reformers in the United States had replaced harsh capital and corporal punishments with imprisonment.
Since imprisonment has become the primary form of serious punishment, many ideologies have inspired various reforms in incarceration. Solitary silence to achieve penance, rehabilitation, retribution, and deterrence are just some of the purposes behind these various reforms. Such reforms in turn have affected not only the conditions of incarceration but also the length of stay for inmates over time.

Philosophies, type of administration, and architecture have also differed throughout the two centuries of the existence of prisons in this country. Different social, political, and economic climates in the North and South led to the creation of two types of prison systems: the northern industrial prison and the southern plantation prison.

Historical events have also influenced and altered prison conditions. Most recently, the Civil Rights Movement improved the conditions of blacks, women, and other minorities in the United States. This movement extended into the prisons to bring some measure of civil rights to the inmates behind bars. Also, both an increase in the numbers and power of black inmates and the "hardening" of prisoners have made the prison of the 1980s a much different kind of place in which to "do time."
The following review of the history of punishment and corrections will include an examination of the various changes outlined above. All losses of freedom as imposed by the State will be considered since the simple condition of being locked up for whatever purpose, under whatever philosophy, is often perceived of as punishment by the incarcerated.

ANCIENT USES OF IMPRISONMENT

Previous to the use of long-term incarceration as a punishment in itself, deprivation of freedom by the State has been noted to be as old as civilization itself. "Places of criminal detention are ancient institutions. Indeed, the ancient cuneiform symbol for 'prison' is a combination of the symbols for 'house' and 'darkness'" (Orland, 1975:13).

In Athens, detention in city jails existed for the accused and those awaiting execution. Detention in jail was also used to coerce convicted offenders into paying fines. If such payment could not be exacted, incarceration could be prolonged indefinitely. Certainly in the eyes of the insolvent culprit, imprisonment was the punishment (Sellin, 1976:15-16). Additionally, both the Greeks and the Romans were known to deprive lower-class
free men of their freedom by life sentences to slavery and hard labor in the mines (Sellin, 1976:17).

EARLY PUNISHMENTS

The history of punishment before the use of long-term incarceration is a parade of cruel torture and deadly horrors. Although banishment, fines, sale into slavery, consignment to galleys, and transportation were used, society's offenders were most often dealt with in a swift and physically intense and severe manner.

Early English law relied extensively on physical punishment, as opposed to fine or imprisonment. When physical punishment was imposed it was severe. Death was imposed by hanging . . . beheading . . . burning . . . drowning and . . . stoning as well as castration, flogging and body mutilation. In medieval England, a man forfeited, for coining, his hand which once amputated was nailed over the mint . . . Although mutilation ultimately disappeared from English law, the brutality of Anglo-Saxon criminal punishment continued unabated into the Eighteenth century (Orland, 1975:14-15).

The primary philosophical justification for such cruel punishment was simple retribution. Those who disobeyed the laws were perceived of as enemies of society who deserved severe punishment "... for willfully breaking its rules" (Allen and Simonsen, 1981:74). Although one might try to make a claim for such punishment as having deterrent purposes also, most scholars characterize early punishment as retributive in nature.
The criminal was paid back by the State for breaking the rules of the State. Retribution, therefore, is to the State what revenge is to the individual.

PENAL PRACTICES IN EUROPE

**State Use of Imprisonment**

Imprisonment, similar to many other elements of the criminal justice system in the United States, has its origin in the European uses of detention by both the State and Church.

Prisons were first mentioned in English legal codes in 890 A.D. For failing to perform tasks to which one was pledged, the sentence was forty days. It is reported that these forty days were made miserable through a series of punishments. The Fleet was the first London structure to have been built specifically as a prison. The date of erection is not known, but it is recorded that it was already in existence in 1120 (Babington, 1971:14). The use of imprisonment was greatly increased by the Assizes of Claredon in 1166, which specified that all counties that had not already constructed gaols (local jails) should immediately do so. To encourage this construction, the building and maintenance would be paid for by the
Crown rather than from the public funds (Babington, 1971:3). Gaols similar to ancient "houses of darkness" were used primarily for pre-detention purposes. However, they also detained those unwilling or unable to pay fines. The gaols also held people much longer than contemporary detainees, as the circuit court sometimes took as much as a year or more to come to the local county to try the prisoners. Therefore, even though the purpose was pre-trial detention, the length of stay awaiting trial assumed, by today's standards, proportions of punishment (Orland, 1975:16). Additionally, some offenders were imprisoned in gaols solely for the purpose of punishment. English law in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries created numerous crimes, "many of which specified the use of imprisonment as punishment or as an inducement to pay fines" (Bowker, 1982:61). Most important of these were the labor control laws.

For example, a law passed in 1349 decreed that agricultural day-laborers and workers in manufacturing industries who accepted wages higher than those existing in 1346-1347 or the average of wages existing in the six prior years should be imprisoned. Another law passed in the same year specified that agricultural workers who attempted to change jobs before their agreed upon term of work was concluded were to suffer imprisonment as punishment (Bowker, 1982:61).

Except for the independently wealthy prisoner, the conditions of medieval jails was horrible. Gaolers
extracted fees from prisoners for being admitted, being released, being fed, not being chained to the walls, for beds, blankets, mattresses, firewood, candles, and every other necessary commodity. The sexes were mixed, and both suffered flogging, starvation, and other forms of torture on occasion. Few gaols provided adequate fresh drinking water or sanitary facilities (Babington, 1971).

Conditions were so bad that John Howard's investigation of the gaols in the 1700's revealed that "despite the heavy toll taken by the gallows for no fewer than 240 separate capital offenses, 'many more persons were destroyed by gaol fever than were put to death by all the public executions in the kingdom'" (Orland, 1975:16).

**Church Use of Imprisonment**

According to Norman Johnston, the Church was the first institution to use imprisonment as a method of punishment rather than detention for trial.

The concept of imprisonment as a substitute for death or mutilation of the body was derived in part from a custom of the early church of granting asylum or sanctuary to fugitives and criminals. Begun largely during the reign of Constantine, this ancient right existed earlier among Assyrians, Hebrews and others. The church at that time had under its aegis a large number of clergy, clerks, functionaries, monks and serfs; except for the latter, most of these fell under the jurisdiction of the church courts. Traditionally, forbidden to shed blood and drawing on the Christian theme of purification through suffering, these canon courts came to subject the
wrongdoer to reclusion and even solitary cellular confinement, not as punishment alone, but as a way of providing conditions under which penitence would most likely occur. . . . Some of the monastic quarters provided totally separate facilities for each monk so that it was a simple matter to lock up an errant brother for brief periods. As "mother houses" of monastic orders had satellite houses often located in less desirable places, it was also the practice to transfer monks for varying periods of time to such locations. There is some evidence that these satellite houses came to be regarded as punitive facilities (Johnston, 1973:8).

Aside from monastic prisons, it appears that every seat of Church government, episcopal palace, and the like contained prisons.

During the Inquisition of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the Church also significantly substituted imprisonment for the death sentence:

Of the 636 condemned individuals, 47% were imprisoned, 22% were condemned to wear crosses, 14% were already dead and had their bones exhumed, 6% were burned alive, and 6% escaped punishment by becoming fugitives (Newman, 1978:23).

Incarceration by the Church was used not only for punishment, but also in the hope that solitary confinement would effect a change in the offender through penitence. It was hoped that the recalcitrant monks and the accused heretics of the Inquisition, locked up alone, would come to see the error of their ways through penance. (Later it would be seen that the development of penitentiaries in the United States expressed the same philosophy.) The influence of these early ecclesiastical prisons upon more
modern penology is difficult to assess. However, according to Johnston, "All in all, the Church dogma of reformation of prisoners left upon later thought and social theory a strong imprint that would be hard to deny" (Johnston, 1973:10).

During the centuries following the medieval period, the breakup of feudalism coupled with the enclosure movement resulted in growing social disorder and unrest in Europe. As the serfs were forced off the land without any means of support, there arose a large increase in the number of vagrants, prostitutes, and petty criminals of all sorts. The Age of Enlightenment of the sixteenth century demanded a punishment less severe than the earlier physical cruelties. The answer of the sixteenth century was the workhouse or house of corrections, an institution built around the idea of the rehabilitative value of regular work and the formation of "habits of industry" (Johnston, 1973:10). The famous English Bridewells (1590), the Hospice Di San Michelle (1704) in Rome, the Milan House of Correction (late 1750's), and the House of Correction in Ghent, Austria (1772) were all based on the philosophy of work as rehabilitation. The following inscription over the entrance of the Hospice de San Michelle states clearly the philosophical basis for these
types of institutions:

It is insufficient to restrain the wicked by punishment unless you render them virtuous by corrective discipline (Johnston, 1973:13).

San Michelle separated the men, boys and women from one another, and Ghent went even further.

Some of the unique characteristics of the facility included isolation of prisoners at night, separation of the sexes, and segregation of prisoners of the same sex according to age, length of sentence and degree of criminality (Johnston, 1973:13).

Both Church and State, therefore, began substituting imprisonment for the death penalty. The erection of work houses and Houses of Corrections all seem to have served the purpose of rehabilitative punishment rather than just pre-trial or pre-execution detention. Work as rehabilitation, however, was unique to these few institutions. They were not ordinary prisons, nor did they represent the usual eighteenth century punishment. These institutions were merely glimmers of humanity during one of the most brutal ages of punishment. Flogging with the cat-o'-nine-tails was the most common form of punishment. Transportation to the American colonies and Australia and the use of convict hulks more commonly characterized punishments of the eighteenth century.
Classical and Neoclassical School of Criminology

However, the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason "was highlighted by the recognition of humanity's essential dignity and imperfection by some of the most brilliant philosophers of history" (Bartollas, 1981:10). It was also during the eighteenth century that both the Italian Cesare Beccaria and the Englishman Jeremy Bentham contributed to the ideas of what is commonly called the classical school of criminology.

Beccaria's *Essays on Crime and Punishment* of 1764 contained the essential principles of the classical school and a new philosophical basis for punishment. For Beccaria, the primary purpose of punishment was to deter crime. Trials should be open and speedy. Punishment should be swift, certain, and proportional to the offense. There should be no capital punishment. Life imprisonment is a better deterrent and makes provision for possible mistakes.

Imprisonment should be more widely employed but its mode of application should be greatly improved through providing better physical quarters and by separating and classifying the prisoners into age, sex, and degree of criminality (Barnes and Teeters, 1943:460-461).

Jeremy Bentham added to the development of the classical school with his "hedonistic calculus." Bentham believed that human beings, at least rational ones, behave
in ways which will achieve the most pleasure with the least amount of pain. Therefore, punishments should be established which outweigh the pleasure or benefits of the criminal act. Moreover, punishments appropriate to the crime will deter the rational human being from committing the crime.

Unlike the theological determinism of the Middle Ages, Bentham's and Beccaria's ideas presented a human being endowed with "free will." Human beings were free to choose and therefore could be held responsible for their behavior. Additionally, people avoid pain and pursue pleasure; therefore, criminal sanctions should outweigh the pleasure derived from crime. Sanctions should be made public so individuals can weigh the outcomes of their behavior. Sanctions should be proportional to the offense, equal justice should be offered to everyone, and individuals should be judged solely for what they do rather than what they believe (Bartollas, 1981:11).

PENAL PRACTICES IN THE UNITED STATES

Penal practices in the United States were influenced by the European heritage of the early colonial settlers. Human beings who deviated were considered sinful. The brutal methods of punishment common in the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries in Europe were also used in colonial America to expiate sins. In general, the colonial penal system emphasized both repression and deterrence. These European influences, however, were eventually tempered by the idealism and reform orientation of the American settlers, resulting in the peculiar American treatment toward criminals and the establishment of a correctional system which the rest of the world would emulate.

Early Colonial Sanctions

As any American school child knows, the early colonists originally came to America to escape religious persecution in England. Most of the early communities were small groups based on a particular religious orientation.

As might be the case in small communities of the present day, relatively mild methods of social control such as gossip, ridicule, and ostracism were usually enough to keep most people in line. However, as Durkheim suggested in his two laws of penal evolution, in small simple mechanical societies, sanctions are often physically intense and cruel. Members of a small community who share the same beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors cannot afford deviants in their midst, as they
are too threatening to the collective consciousness. Therefore, sanctions must be relatively cruel: the deviant must be publicly known and punished, and in many cases eliminated, so as not to endanger the community as a whole.

Accordingly, early punishments in colonial America maintained the Anglo-Saxon tradition of physical torture, mutilation, and death. The early colonists, although escaping from England in order to practice religious freedom, were not very liberal or flexible in their tolerance of deviance, particularly religious deviance. Discomfort and public embarrassment were combined in the use of stocks and pillories as a means of social control. The early American colonies also used the corporal forms of punishment from their English heritage: whippings and hangings. Although the fine and whip were most widely used, branding was also inflicted with some regularity.

In the early East Jersey code of 1668 and 1675, first-time burglarly offenders were branded with a "T" on the hand; the second offense was punished by the branding of a "T" on the forehead. In Maryland those who were found guilty of blasphemy were branded on the forehead with the letter "B." An adulteress, like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, was forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" in Puritan-controlled New England (Bartollas, 1981:12).

The colonial codes also broadly defined capital offenses and colonial courts did not hesitate to exact the death penalty; an estimated 20% of the punishment meted out by New York's colonial courts were capital (Orland, 1975:20).
Since the religious belief system was the basis for the community, any religious deviance was perceived as a dangerous threat to that community. Therefore, such offenses as blasphemy and missing church on Sunday incurred capital punishment. Specifically, the Hempstead Long Island Code of 1664 specified death for eleven crimes, including "denying the one true God, murder, copulation with animals, homosexuality, kidnapping, rebellion and striking one's parents" (Bowker, 1982:69).

The "milder" forms of punishment, involving public humiliation, were not always so mild:

Offenders placed in the stocks (sitting down, hands and feet fastened into a locked frame) or in the pillory (standing with head and hands fastened into a locked frame) were flogged, spit upon, heaped with garbage, and reviled by all who passed by (Allen and Simonsen, 1981:8).

It was often the case that the offender's ears were nailed to the pillory and cut or ripped off when the time in the pillory was ended. Additionally, those offenders who had particularly annoyed the community's consciousness were pelted with rocks while in the pillory or stocks and often died as a result.

Similar to early English practices, such cruel colonial punishments also generally fall under the philosophical justification of retribution. The cultural baggage that the early settlers brought with them to
America did not include any idea that criminal sanctions could serve the wayward. Informed by religious doctrines teaching the natural wickedness of the human spirit, there was no possibility for conceiving of punishment as rehabilitation (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982:46-47).

The colonists took a pessimistic view of humankind; man was a depraved creature cursed by original sin. There was no hope of "correcting" or "rehabilitating" the offender. An inscrutable God controlled the fate of the individual (Samuel Walker as quoted in Cullen and Gilbert, 1982:47).

A Glimmer of Penal Reform

Punishment in the early colonial period was indeed as harsh and cruel as any of the earlier English punishments. However, a more lenient attitude was reflected in the "Great Law of Pennsylvania." As early as 1682, William Penn had obtained permission from the monarch to institute a law which retained the death penalty only in cases of homicide and allowed the substitution of hard labor for former bloody punishments. Penn was influenced not only by his Quaker heritage but also by his six months spent in Newgate Prison in London. He had inspected the Dutch workhouses before he left for the colonies and brought the idea of substituting prison for the gallows, labor for bloody punishments, and workshops for idleness (Lewis, 1967:10). Such mild penal codes were not the norm in the
colonies and only existed in Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1717 (Hibbert, 1963:156).

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the spirit of penal reform became evident once again in the colonies. Prompted by post-Revolutionary War reorganization, some states began seeking new methods for the disposition of criminals. Pennsylvania, reflecting the traditions of its founder, was a leader in the reform movement.

Quakers and other humanists were unhappy with the severe criminal codes which had been imposed upon them during their colonial status:

In that year in the frame of the provisional state constitution they wrote: "The Penal Laws heretofore used shall be reformed by the future legislation of the State, as soon as may be, and punishments made in some cases less sanguinary, and in general more proportionate to the crime" (Nagel, 1973:6).

The newly formed United States was influenced by the growing philosophy of rationalism and the spirit of progress and enlightenment. According to Harry Elmer Barnes, the old barbaric punishments were not compatible with the new rational philosophy of progress and enlightenment:

If American statesmen were to give more than lip service to the humane and optimistic idea of man's improvability they must remove the barbarism and vindictiveness from their penal codes and admit that one great objective of punishment for crime must be
the reformation of the criminal (Tyler, 1944 as quoted in Nagel, 1973:7).

Within this intellectual climate of reform, the Pennsylvania legislature greatly reduced the application of the death penalty by 1786. Even with this reduction in capital punishment, the jails were still not being perceived of as an alternative to capital punishment.

Under the influence of the great prison investigator and reformer John Howard of England, American jails also began to change:

In 1787, a group of influential Philadelphians gathered at the home of Benjamin Franklin to hear Benjamin Rush read a paper proposing the establishment of a prison program with the following features:

1. Classify prisoners for housing
2. Provide prison labor to make the institution self-supporting
3. Include gardens to provide food and outdoor areas for recreation
4. Classify convicts according to a judgment about the nature of the crime—whether it arose out of passion, habit, temptation or mental illness
5. Impose indeterminate periods of confinement based upon the convicts' reformatory progress (Bartollas, 1981:13).

Later that year, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Persons was formed and dedicated to the planning of a satisfactory prison system. In March of 1789, the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth accepted the main recommendations of the Prison Society
and provided that the Walnut Street Jail should be remodeled to receive prisoners of both serious and non-serious crimes. The more serious prisoners were to be confined in sixteen newly built cells in the backyard of the existing jail. These solitary cells were each "... six feet wide, eight feet long and nine feet high, a total of 432 cubic feet" (Lewis, 1922:25). The convicts in the solitary cells were not expected to work, however. Only the less serious offenders who were housed in the jail proper were expected to work in the shops during the day, in association with one another.

The Quakers not only instituted milder penal practices but also influenced the primary philosophy or goal of the new prisons-- penitence. The rule of silence and solitary confinement for the serious offenders in the Walnut Street Jail allowed the inmates to turn their thoughts inward and eventually repent their sins and crimes. Criminals could thus be reformed. The newly converted Walnut Street Jail of 1790 marked the birth of the modern American correctional system. Prisons, more specifically, penitentiaries, would now replace capital punishment and physical punishments. Certainly the parade of punishments from the twelfth century in England up to and including the nineteenth century in the United States
suggests strongly that imprisonment became a more humane type of punishment.

In addition to the building of cells which isolated felons from one another, from other less serious offenders, and from the world outside, the horrible conditions which had existed in jails up to that time were also eliminated. The sale of liquor was prohibited. Women were separated from the men, and children were no longer to be housed in jail. Food and clothing were provided by the Commonwealth. The days of licentiousness and debauchery were to end. No longer would inmates starve or go naked and freeze in confinement. Together, the Pennsylvania Legislature and the Prison Society had drawn up the first rules ever compiled in this country for the operation of penal institutions (Nagel, 1973:8).

However, increasing population and overcrowding soon caused the Walnut Street Jail, as well as other prisons in New York and Massachusetts which had followed the Walnut Street model, to deteriorate (Hibbert, 1963:157). Classification and segregation broke down. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, disease, filth, vermin, and vice characterized daily existence, so that the conditions of the new prisons did not appear much different than those of jails before the reform.
Auburn and Pennsylvania Models of Prison

In 1829 legislation was passed which provided for solitary confinement as Pennsylvania's official penal model. Now all those incarcerated, not just those convicted of serious crimes, were to be isolated from one another. Penitentiaries were built in both Pennsylvania and New York based upon silence and isolation. The prevailing idea was that criminals could be reformed by separating them from each other and the rest of the community. Pennsylvania was so concerned with complete isolation of the inmate that upon entry to the penitentiary, a black hood was placed over his head and was not removed until he had been placed in his cell alone with the Bible. From that point on the inmate ate alone and worked alone. A small exercise yard was attached to each individual cell where the inmate was allowed out to exercise twice daily, also alone. A strict regimen of isolation and contemplation was enforced. It was believed that this strict regimen and the reading of the Scriptures would provide the offender with moral guidance for reform.

However, as Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont observed, the total isolation and solitude were indeed the most brutal punishments of all:

but this absolute solitude . . . is beyond the strength of man; it destroys the criminal without
intermission and without pity. It does not reform. It kills (de Beaumont and de Tocqueville, 1833:41).

After a visit to the Eastern Pennsylvania Penitentiary in 1842, Charles Dickens also decided that "... very few men were capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony which this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the prisoner and believed that the slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain was immeasurably worse than any torture of the body" (Hibbert, 1963:157). As is now known, this supposedly more humane punishment was quite likely to drive most men to the brink of insanity.

The Auburn System in New York quickly recognized this danger and, differing from the Pennsylvania model, eliminated total isolation and allowed inmates to work and eat together. However, they worked and ate in silence and at night slept alone in individual cells. The cells were much smaller than the Pennsylvania cells, as inmates only slept in them. The problems with the Auburn System emanated from enforcing the rule of silence. Prisoners ate together but sat face to back. Additionally, while moving the inmates to meals and work stations the lockstep, a slow shuffle, was used. In the lockstep, ". . . each prisoner kept his head turned to the right
with one hand placed on the shoulders of the prisoner in
front of him" (Bartollas, 1981:17).

The lockstep and face-to-back eating arrangements
were not enough to enforce the rule of silence, however.
It was fear of the lash which ultimately achieved
compliance with this rule. Although the development of
the prison was influenced partially by the Quakers' hope
for repentance and reform of the prisoner, the warden at
Sing-Sing (an Auburn type of prison), Elam Lynds, did not
believe in the possibilities of reform. His only concern
was to produce obedient and securely incarcerated
prisoners. He did so through frequent use of a rawhide
whip or a "cat" made of six strands of wire. It was
reported that he would order as many as five hundred blows
on a prisoner at a time. He also flogged the insane and
those who suffered epileptic seizures. When asked how he
knew which prisoner in a cellblock was breaking the rule
of silence, Lynds replied, "Take out 15, 20 or 25 and flog
them all, and you will be sure to get the right one"
(Lewis, 1965:95). Elam Lynds' tactics prevailed, and his
regime represents the many autocratic administrations
which were to dominate prisons well into the 1950s.

While both types of prisons had drawbacks, they also
had advantages, at least according to their advocates.
The Pennsylvania system certainly did not have many
discipline problems. However, as the population increased in the United States, more offenders were sent to prison, and the large cells of the Pennsylvania system with their individual exercise yards were simply too expensive to build. The Auburn type was not as expensive to build. Additionally, in Auburn the inmates worked together, which allowed more profitable labor than that produced in individual cells. Finally, it was believed that the congregate work system provided job training which prepared prisoners more adequately for jobs in the community.

Eventually, economic considerations prevailed, and the New York Auburn system became the model for prisons in the United States. Eventually, prisons in the North, Northeast, Middle Atlantic, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee areas were constructed along the lines of the Auburn system, emphasizing non-interaction among inmates while permitting congregate labor. The congregate work plan became even more efficient through the use of contract labor. Auburn had scarcely begun operation when an enterprising citizen applied for a contract to run a factory within the walls. The use of inexpensive prison labor enriched not only this initial citizen but also many more ambitious capitalists. Although mechanics'
associations raised grievances, no changes occurred. Authorities rejoiced over their successful reduction of the tax burden, and contractors also were pleased with their profits. These initial contractors in turn helped develop a stable penal system in the United States (McKelvey, 1977:21). Through the efforts of these enterprising young capitalists, not only did the prisons become economically efficient but the model of the northern industrial prison was also established.

It must also be noted that even though profits and economic stability were primary motivations in the North, there was also a constant underlying current concerned with the reform of the inmate. One of the arguments for the support of the Auburn system was that the work trained the inmates with skills which could be used upon release. Additionally, reformers and prison societies were concerned with the spiritual development of the inmate. Louis Dwight, founder and organizer of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, approved of the Auburn system (McKelvey, 1977:15). Dwight added revivals and Sabbath Schools to the industry, which indeed may have provided for the responsive prisoner a satisfactory adjustment to society. However, the all-absorbing concern of wardens was to make the prisons pay their way. Only wardens who were able to make their prisons self-sufficient had the
opportunity to express any concern with programs designed for the reformation of the inmates. This overriding concern with economic stability led to the continued use of convict labor through contracts in the North, lease systems in the South, and many other ingenious forms of using prisoners for work.

By 1850 the great hopes of the Auburn system were being questioned. The United States population again was increasing and so was the population of prisons. Prisons were characterized more by lack of discipline and mismanagement, resulting in idleness for inmates, rather than by daily disciplined productivity. Again, the prisons had deteriorated to institutions which were overpopulated, filthy, and violent.

The Establishment of Reformatorys

Undaunted, American prison reformers again gathered momentum. In 1870, a delegation of some 130 representatives from 24 states met at the First American Prison Congress in Cincinnati, Ohio. This first Congress developed a "new penology" which was to guide prison administrators in their care and supervision of inmates for the following one hundred years. The ideas were not immediately transformed into practice, but a distinctly
new orientation for dealing with inmates and prisons was developed.

The approved Declaration of Principles stated:

Crime is an intentional violation of duties imposed by law ... Punishment is suffering ... in expiation of the wrong done ... Crime is ... a moral disease, of which punishment is the remedy. The efficiency of the remedy is a question of social therapeutics, a question of the fitness and the measure of the dose ... punishment is directed not to the crime but the criminal ... his regeneration—his new birth to respect for the laws. Hence ... the supreme aim of prison discipline is the reformation of criminals, not the vindictive suffering ... The progressive classification of prisoners, based on merit and not on mere arbitrary principles, as age, crime ... should be established ... a penal stage ... a reformatory state ... a probationary stage. Since hope is a more potent agent than fear [we should establish] ... a system of rewards ... (1) A diminution of sentence. (2) A participation of prisoners in their earnings. (3) A gradual withdrawal of prison restraints. (4) Constantly increasing privileges ... earned by good conduct ... The prisoner's destiny, during his incarceration, should be placed, measurably, in his own hands ... Peremptory sentences ought to be replaced by those of indeterminant duration—sentences limited only by satisfactory proof of reformation should be substituted for those measured by mere lapse of time (Bartollas, 1981:19).

Here in the Declaration of Principles in 1870 is the beginning of the shift to rehabilitation or reformation of the criminal as the primary goal or philosophy of imprisonment. Inmates were also to have some control over and rewards for their good behavior and reformation. Finally, indeterminate sentencing based on the reformation process of the convict was proposed.
Inspired by the enthusiasm of the meetings or by the "mountain top experience," as it has been referred to, participants returned to their states with the hopes of instituting a new era in corrections. This new era would be one in which inmates could be trained to successfully re-enter the community.

Led by Zebulon Brockway, the new reform model was put into practice at the Elmira reformatory in New York State in 1876. Elmira was designed for prisoners between the ages of sixteen and thirty. The main components of this new reformatory model were a classification (or mark) system, indeterminate sentencing, parole, and a variety of religious, academic, vocational, and recreational programs.

The classification system meant that through positive behavior and good work habits an inmate could earn promotion to the top category. This promotion meant that the inmate could be eligible for parole and release through his own efforts rather than waiting for his full sentence to be served. Tied into the indeterminate sentence rather than the former practice of fixed sentences, which did not permit the inmates release until the full time had been served or the governor granted a parole, the classification system meant the inmates could shorten their length of stay behind bars. The
institution's various programs were designed to fulfill two primary goals: (1) to train the inmate away from the criminal life, and (2) to keep the inmates busy while incarcerated.

Eighteen reformatories were built in the United States over the next few decades. By the turn of the century, this new and hopeful innovation also evidenced signs of failure similar to previous penal reforms. Inmate violence, ineffective programs, and inadequate staffing made the reformatories little different from older penitentiaries (Bartollas, 1981:19-21).

**Northern Industrial Prisons**

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, it is obvious that even if prisons did not do anything else with their inmates, they certainly made them work. Whether the purpose of work was training for work upon release, reformation, maintaining discipline, or economic profit, work was the most common feature of prisons during the nineteenth century.

However, prisons in different geographical locations of the United States worked the inmates at distinctly different tasks and with different methods. In the North, prisoners most often had factory systems run either by the
state or by a private contractor. The work of the prison was therefore dictated by the surrounding economic system in which it was located. The work was administered according to various methods: (1) contract, (2) lease, and (3) piece price.

The contract system, in which private contractors established factories within the prison, has already been mentioned along with the development of the Auburn model of prisons. Variations existed, however, within the contract system. Sometimes the contractor simply paid a lump sum for the use of the total inmate population and in other cases paid a set fee per day per head (inmate). In this system, the prison was always paid for the use of their captive labor. The payment did not depend upon whether a profit was made by the contractor. The piece price system was also a sure income for the state, as private companies provided the inmates with the raw material and received the finished product at an agreed upon price. It should also be noted that in the contract system,

strictly applied, . . . state officials [were] directly responsible for feeding, clothing and guarding the convicts who remained within the prison structure. [That is,] . . . contractors hired only convict labor and not the convicts themselves (Carleton, 1971:22).
On the other hand, the lease system enabled the lessee to hire the convicts themselves "and empowered [the lessee] to work convicts outside the prison structure" (Carleton, 1971:22). Under the lease system the lessee, not the state, was responsible for feeding, clothing and guarding the convicts. Abuses of the lease system were rampant. A more extensive discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the lease system will be covered in the following section on Southern prisons.

Income to the state, through whatever method, helped to defray the cost of operating prisons and additionally made the taxpayers happy, as less money would have to come from their pockets to take care of the criminal population. As of 1904, a substantial sum of money estimated at $33,280,940 came from prison-made products in the U.S. (Bowker, 1982:82). However, unlike the mechanics associations of the nineteenth century which opposed inmate labor but did not succeed in changing anything, the growing strength of the labor unions in the early twentieth century did have an impact on prison industries.

Finally, two pieces of federal legislation, the Hawes-Cooper Act of 1929 and the Ashurst-Summers Act of 1935 amended in 1940, put an end to the interstate transport of prison products:
Already handicapped by inefficiency, poor facilities and often corruption, the industrial prisons could not hope to make a profit in the face of these constraints. The proportion of prisoners who were industrially occupied declined, and prisons were compelled to adopt the closed-market system, in which prison goods were sold only to governmental agencies and non-profit organizations (Bowker, 1982:83).

Whether products were sold on the open market or simply used for the prison and other in-state organizations, the labor that most Northern inmates did was an industrial type of labor performed primarily within the prison walls. It is within this northern industrial type of prison that most of the data for the discussion of inmate subculture in the next chapter of this study has been collected.

As prison industries declined, American penal practitioners had to find yet another focus to organize the correctional system. During the first decades of the twentieth century, classification of prisoners had been instituted, and probation and parole had been firmly established. However, prisons in the early part of this century were some of the most retrogressive of American institutions. Prison populations had again mushroomed. The decline of prison industries had forced most inmates into increased idleness and unbearable tension. Autocratic wardens instituted repressive controls and
ruled with an iron fist. The day-to-day life of the inmate was intolerable.

**Prisons as Correctional Institutions**

The Rehabilitation Model. By 1930 it was clear that the history of good intentions characteristic of the various previous prison reforms in the United States had failed. However, the failure seemed to spur a new wave of reforms which has lasted until the present decade of the 1980s.

Primarily during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, continuing in some cases through the 1970s, it was commonly believed that a major function of prison should be to rehabilitate the offender. Auguste Comte's philosophy of positivism had gained great popularity and, combined with the full-blown arrival of the industrial age, led to a major shift in the study of punishments. Crime was one of the many fields to which the scientific method was applied. Positivism assumed that science could be applied to all human behavior. Based on a scientific model of cause and effect, it further assumed that causes could be found for all human behavior, including criminal behavior. Positivism emphasized learning the cause of crime, then taking action to eradicate the cause, ultimately reducing crime. Positivism impacted
criminology and prisons. Instead of concentrating on the seriousness of the crime with little consideration for extenuating circumstances or the individual's motives, as the classical school of thought had done, the positive school of criminology now concentrated on etiology. Whatever the causes of criminal behavior—biological, psychological, occupational, or socio-cultural—the incarcerated could be cured of the "problem" or "illness." Prisons now took responsibility for curing the inmates of whatever disease caused them to commit crime. The rehabilitation or medical model of imprisonment was to pervade the prison system for many decades to come.

In order to cure the "sick" inmates, a series of psychological treatments including psychodrama, transactional analysis, reality therapy, behavior modification, and group therapy entered the prison gates. Educational and vocational training were also emphasized. American idealism had not waned. The criminal could be corrected and returned to the community as a productive member of society.

However, by the early 1970s, inmates, administrators, and the public realized the ineffectiveness of the rehabilitation model of corrections. A number of reasons led to this new disillusionment. First, the model's basic
premise of cure and change has been criticized for being the most unjust of all reforms in American prisons. Since the prison was supposed to rehabilitate, sentences were indeterminate. Only the prison administration and treatment staff could determine when the inmate was "cured." This in turn led to varied and inequitable periods of incarceration for the inmates. They were forced to play the mind games of the treatment staff. The inmates learned how to play the games well, in most cases only for the goal of obtaining release. The staff and inmates both knew that the rehabilitation model was a failure.

The Reintegration Model. By the 1960s, a better correctional model was once again sought. The Corrections Task Force of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice recommended that community-based corrections be used for all but the most hard-core offenders. Reintegration was the philosophical basis for this new model. It was finally recognized that incarceration may not do anything except reinforce inmates' criminal behavior. Therefore, imprisonment should be reserved for those who are considered violent and dangerous to the community at large and those who have exhibited such a pattern of criminal behavior that nothing will help anyway. Most offenders should be kept in the
community, and they should be helped to reintegrate into the community at the end of any period of incarceration.

The reintegration model depended upon the community as the center of treatment. Offenders would be placed not only in jail facilities but also in various other types of intensive supervision programs. If it was necessary to incarcerate individuals, the length of stay would be shortened and softened by a wide range of programs such as prerelease, work release, educational release, conjugal visits, co-ed facilities, and home furloughs. Individuals who had to be incarcerated were also supposed to have input into treatment programs devised for them while in prison.

Again, proponents of this model believed that the Golden Age of Corrections had arrived. Sadly, this new model, like the others, was doomed to failure. Communities generally resisted the placement of offenders in their neighborhood. In those cases where there was little or no resistance, these centers were often poorly managed. The geographical isolation of existing prisons prevented any real community reintegration programs. Finally, the hard-line, get-tough-with-criminals policy of the 1970s produced a variety of other impeding factors. First, more offenders were imprisoned, resulting in
overcrowded prisons, which then had difficulty implementing truly effective treatment programs. The inmates were not able to have input, and there were not enough programs to go around. Finally, departments of corrections were forced to upgrade their criteria for eligibility for work release, educational release, and home furloughs. Co-ed corrections became too costly, and conjugal visits still engender great dispute. Another panacea had failed.

The Return of the Neoclassical Model

In the 1970s, both politically liberal and conservative camps joined forces to critique and finish off corrections as rehabilitation and reintegration. The conservatives attacked rehabilitation on the grounds that it "permitted the intolerable victimization of the innocent citizen" (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982:91). The liberals believed that the justice system victimized the offender. Although coming from two different philosophical bases, these two groups devised a similar prescription to solve the failures of American criminal justice: "... rehabilitation and the indeterminate sentence must be abandoned and replaced by the principles of just deserts and determinancy" (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982:91). This strange bedfellow alliance led to a reform
movement which has quickly implemented determinant and mandatory sentences in most states, thereby minimizing rehabilitation as the primary goal of corrections.

However, these two groups have proposed different models to implement "justice." The conservatives' model, with James Q. Wilson and Ernest van den Haag at its front, advocate severity and certainty of punishment. They have recommended longer sentences to keep criminals off the streets and to confirm that crime does not pay. Van den Haag has even recommended that some criminals should not be returned to the community after finishing their sentences but should be banished or exiled.

Incapacitation is the primary goal of this model. This conservative or punishment model has already implemented many new policies of the criminal justice system with implications for corrections. First, violent juvenile offenders are more frequently being transferred to adult courts for felony proceedings. Second, an increased reliance on incapacitation is resulting in the incarceration of all offenders convicted of serious crimes. Additionally, repeat offenders are more often incarcerated for life under habitual offender statutes. Third, determinant and mandatory sentences have begun to replace indeterminate sentences, resulting in more
overcrowded prisons and projections in some states that the prison populations will double and maybe triple within the next decade. Finally, the death penalty has been restored.

The liberals have proposed a slightly different model of "justice" which has different implications for the criminal justice system and corrections, although, as already stated, they propose some of the same specifics as the conservative camp or punishment model. With a rationale of retributive justice, the following eight points summarize the "justice model" as proposed by David Fogel, Norval Morris, and Andrew von Hirsch:

1. For justice to be possible, all sentences must be "determinate" or "flat."

2. The principle of just deserts and not that of individualized treatment will regulate the sanction an offender receives.

3. Sentences will be legislatively-fixed and narrow in range.

4. Compared to current sentencing practices, the lengths of prison terms should be substantially reduced.

5. The discretion exercised by judges will be severely restricted.

6. Parole-release will be abolished.

7. Voluntary rehabilitation programs should be supported and expanded.

8. All inmates should reside in a just and humane environment (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982:127-130).
The political climate in the United States from the middle 1970s until the present has led to a ready acceptance not of the "justice" model but of the "punishment" model of the conservatives. Why? First, the media, using official crime statistics, have managed to convince the public that crime has gotten out of hand and that firm measures must be taken to control it. Second, politicians have realized that law-and-order backlash can be politically expedient for them. Finally, as the history of corrections and punishment illustrates, none of the other reforms have managed to decrease recidivism.

The Southern Prison

The development of prisons in the United States initially in the 1700s and through the Reform in the late 1800s was primarily a Northern affair. The South has had a different history of penal practices well into the twentieth century. Although the South built prisons before the Civil War, it had not established the stable penal system of the North. Most southern states used the lease system, which led to particularly horrible conditions for the convicts. Additionally, punishment and incarceration were more often left to the control of the local authorities, the counties. Finally, the South has generally lacked the prison reform tradition of its
neighbors, partly or mostly because the black issue obscured nearly all other problems for almost 150 years.

The Antebellum Prison. The southern states built prisons before the Civil War. The penitentiary movement of the North did spread to the southern states. In fact, Kentucky opened its prison at Frankfort in 1794. Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas all had opened penitentiaries by the 1850s. Prior to the opening of the state penitentiaries, the southern states had let the counties deal with the convicts. Both the Carolinas and Florida continued to use this practice of county control and did not build any state prisons until after the Civil War.

Some southern states also picked up on the northern philosophy of the reformatory value of incarceration. "In 1827, for instance, Governor Brandon of Mississippi" recommended to the legislature that "To inflict punishment with no effort at reformation only prepares for the commission of more crimes" (Sellin, 1976:141). Therefore, as Sellin (1976:141) observes, "... prisoners, whites of course, should be taught a trade, and this would make a penitentiary self-sustaining rather than a burden on the taxpayers." The profit incentive motivated southern
prisons, not unlike the northern institutions. However, when the penitentiaries failed to make a profit, "... leasing became a means of avoiding the expense of maintaining prisoners" (Carleton, 1971:7). "... all too frequently the authorities ... shifted the burden of maintaining prisons to the first person who offered to assume it" (McKelvey, 1977:45). Kentucky again was the forerunner by turning its state penitentiary over to a lessee in 1832, and Missouri, Louisiana, Alabama, and many of the other southern states soon followed suit (Sellin, 1976:141). Alabama was so eager to get rid of the costly responsibility for its incarcerated population that in 1846 the state leased the penitentiary, convicts and all, to a private firm for six years, free of charge. The lease was renewed twice, and Alabama did not retake control of its incarcerated again for twenty years, in 1866 (Sellin, 1976:143). Moreover, Louisiana did not make the leasing of convicts illegal until 1898. "And not until 1901 did lessees vacate the penal system" in Louisiana (Carleton, 1971:82). Finally, the convict lease system did not entirely cease in the South until "... the disappearance by 1933 of the system's lingering vestiges in North Carolina" (Carleton, 1971:83).

Not only did the southern states turn over the responsibility of prison administration to the lessee, but
they also maintained no control, supervision, or inspection of either the prison or the prisoners. Although the northern states used both lease and contract systems, they almost always maintained control. The northern warden was not replaced by the contractor or the lessee. Therefore, the institution remained under the supervision and control of the state. On the other hand, the southern states gave up all supervision and control to the contractor/lessee.

The southern states which left control of the convicts to the county did not do much better. The counties also leased their inmates and maintained no more control than the state. In most cases, the county jails and the work camps to which the leased inmate was sent were worse, if possible, than the state-leased conditions. Whether before or after the Civil War, the lease system, in the South particularly, led to some of the most inhumane conditions of incarceration recorded in American penal history.

The South built prisons during the Antebellum period; however, it would be over one hundred years before the South would be inspired by any penal reform philosophy, if at all. (Some critics suggest that the South has only
implemented any humanitarian reform because of Supreme Court interventions during the early 1980s.)

In the North abolition of slavery and penal reform "were both part of the greater humanitarian movement," a fact which probably "caused the Southern people to look askance at both." If, therefore, penal reform outside the South was vigorously implemented during the 1830s, the rise of abolitionism to the forefront of the general reform movement did much to retard other efforts in the direction of betterment, including prison reform, throughout the South during the same period (Carleton, 1971:5).

Penal reform connected with abolitionism simply could not be incorporated within the southern culture.

Before the Civil War the penitentiaries and even the county jails were reserved for whites. It was a rare occasion when any blacks were found in a southern prison or jail. For example, Georgia's prison population in 1841 consisted of 159 white prisoners, four of them women, plus one mulatto. In the same year, Tennessee housed 173 white and 6 black male prisoners (Sellin, 1976:140).

Most blacks were slaves, and even the free blacks were thought of as being part of the slave class. Free blacks who committed serious crimes and who were not hanged were flogged, sold as slaves, and/or deported. A free black was an anomaly in the South. Black and slave status were considered synonymous.

In general, most slaves were punished by their masters. The punishments used were those of early
colonial times: whipping, confining in stocks and pillories, branding, and mutilating. Runaways were confined in stocks and pillories when they were not working.

Traditional criminal law was reserved for free men—white free men. However, the South did develop a group of laws called the Black Codes to keep the slave labor force intact, docile, and terrified. Breaking curfew, leaving the plantation without a pass, five or more blacks congregating without a white person, owning firearms, buying liquor or gambling, and working in a drug store or printing shop are just some of the activities which were considered illegal for blacks in the South (Sellin, 1976:137). The punishment for any one of these activities was also harsher than that applied to white people. The most common punishment for the blacks was whipping or death. Slaves were executed for criminal homicide regardless of its degree, whites only for murder. Before the Emancipation, Virginia decreed various penitentiary sentences for whites, "... but death for slaves convicted of one of a dozen or more felonies, from rape to knowingly buying or receiving a stolen horse" (Sellin, 1976:138). Additionally, Louisiana stated that slaves would...

... be killed if convicted for the third time of
striking a white, and if forgetting his lowly status, he "struck his master, a member of the master's family, or the overseer," so as to cause a contusion, or effusion or shedding of blood (Sellin, 1976:138).

The penitentiary or even the county jail was not the place where blacks would be punished in the South before the Civil War.

Post Civil War Prisons. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the South was faced with two major problems: the reconstruction of the physical damage wrought during the war and the control of the newly freed black population.

In an efficient although questionable manner, the South quickly solved its dual problems. How? Newly freed blacks were incarcerated and used to rebuild the South through the resumption of the lease system. The former Black Codes were now enforced against this group of "... poor, unskilled, bewildered ex-slaves cast into freedom for which few of them were prepared" (Sellin, 1976:145). Additionally, "... the theft ... of any kind of cattle or swine, regardless of value" was considered grand larceny bearing a term of up to five years in the state penitentiary (Sellin, 1976:147). Enforcement of this famous "pig law," in addition to the enforcement of vagrancy laws, enabled the South to regain control of this new population of free blacks.
As will be discussed later, it was through the enforcement of vagrancy laws and the prohibition against liquor and gambling that many musicians were frequently incarcerated in local jails. The Emancipation Proclamation did not change the southerners' perspective of the black people. Blacks were still considered by some to be subhuman, needing to be controlled because they did not have the ability or inclination to control or take care of themselves. Free blacks with visions of a mule and forty acres quickly found themselves doing the same work they had performed before emancipation. Only this time they were under the supervision of civilians who had leased them from the state prisons and county jails. This time, the conditions in which they found themselves were perhaps even worse than on the plantations. Plantation owners had been concerned about the health and strength of the slaves in order to get the most work out of them. The incarcerated blacks were not, however, protected by any paternalism of their masters. If they were not chained and shackled during the day they were chained in the places where they slept at night.

The incarceration of large numbers of freed blacks quickly led in turn to an overflow of southern prisons, now comprised of 85-90% black inmates. For instance, Mississippi's state prison population increased from 284
in 1874 to 1,072 at the end of 1887 (Sellin, 1976:147).

In order to handle such a sudden and large increase in the convict population, the South revived the lease system. Primarily black inmates were put to work under the supervision of lessees and sublessees to rebuild roads, railroads, levees, plantations, and any other reconstruction work which had to be accomplished. All across the South the prisoners, mostly black now, were again completely at the mercy of the lessees and their guards. The press occasionally carried reports of flagrant abuses. However, the white public never reacted very strongly, knowing that none of their tax dollars were being spent on prisons and also that the camps were almost totally populated by blacks. Critics of the system did finally arouse the legislature of Mississippi. The report of the legislative committee in 1884 stated that prisoners on

. . . farms and public works have been subjected to indignities without authority of law and contrary to civilized humanity. Often . . . sublessees resort to 'pulling' the prisoner until he faints from the lash on his naked back, while the sufferer was held by four strong men holding each a hand or foot stretched out on the frozen ground or over stumps or logs—often over 300 stripes at a time, which more than once, it is thought, resulted in the death of the convict. Men unable to work have been driven to their death and some have died fettered to the chain gang (Sellin, 1976:148).
Fifteen percent of Mississippi convicts died in prison from 1882 to 1887. In 1869, the death rate among Alabama convicts was 41% (Van Deusen, 1938:124). In fact, the southern convict death rate was often three to ten times more than that in the northern states.

The lease system finally came to an end. Several factors led to its demise. The railroad boom, which used convict labor, spent itself. The states also became aware of how much money the lessees were making with labor which the states had provided. The states wanted that profit. Additionally, it appears that abuses of some inmates did rile the public temperament. However, it was not the abuses which the blacks suffered but abuses suffered by white inmates which were of concern to most southerners.

When the lease system died, the states took control. However, they still had a large convict population that had to be taken care of and still not enough prisons to house them. By the turn of the century two other state methods of using prison labor developed: work on public roads by chain gangs, and prison farms.

The Chain Gang. During the late nineteenth century, roads were primitive. Many states had used county jail prisoners and state convicts in a limited way to build roads. For the South, which had a tradition of using gangs of leased and chained convicts to build levees and
railroads, the construction and maintenance of state highways and county roads by convict labor seemed an excellent way to meet the rising costs of the automobile age and simultaneously avoid building costly prisons.

The chain gang, as noted, was not a brand new institution. Sellin states that a North Carolina law of 1831 specified that any free "colored" person could be sold to anyone who would pay the most for five years of servitude. In North Carolina,

the chain gang was instituted when the legislature authorized inferior and superior courts 'to sentence the offender to work in chain gangs on the public roads of the county or on any railroad or other work of internal improvement in a state' for a term of a year or less. Overseers appointed by the county courts supervised the road workers. In 1870, an act provided that those sentenced to hard labor for less than two years were to be used to build roads, and overseers were authorized 'to confine said conficts together with or if need with ball and chain'" (Sellin, 1976:164)

After 1886 a number of counties in North Carolina established chain gangs which were sent out from the county workhouses. The chain gangs were originally reserved for black prisoners. For example, in Alabama the first white prisoners did not appear in the chain gangs until the 1940s. Even though the states were supposed to supervise the chain gangs operated by the local counties, in effect little control was exercised by the states. Therefore, conditions varied greatly from county to
county. Some used almost no corporal punishment while others used a great deal. By the 1930s, some North Carolina counties no longer chained their road gangs; others chained only a few of the more dangerous criminals; and some chained almost all of them (Sellin, 1976).

The conditions of the chain gangs operated by the states and counties were no better than the labor camps formerly operated by lessees. Whipping and confinement to a sweat box were used as punishments to maximize the work productivity of the prisoners. Conditions were so bad, especially in Florida, during the early years of the system that J. C. Powell (1891), an overseer, felt justified in labeling it the "American Siberia." Not just the punishments to encourage work productivity were bad; the normal living conditions could easily be interpreted as punishment. The following quote illustrates such normal living conditions of the chain gang camps in Georgia in 1933:

Parked along the road among the scrubpine stands a row of great wagons, square like those in which a circus keeps its pacing animals. A lattice of steel bars forms the sides. Within each cage-on-wheels, 12 men are confined. Six bunks are along each side, three deep, end to end. In these, after long hours of back-breaking work on the roads, often chained to each other, men sleep in the same sweat-begrimed clothes in which they have worked all day. A heavy canvas curtain, which may be unrolled to cover the barred sides of the cage, is their only protection against weather. In each cage is a narrow cutoff,
above a metal tub suspended just beneath the cage. That is the only sanitary arrangement . . . These cages . . . meet all the requirements of the State Prison Commission for living quarters "when not in permanent quarters" (Sellin, 1976:168).

Chain gangs no longer exist in American corrections. However, the use of prisoners to labor on public works still exists in road prisons and correction camps scattered throughout the nation.

**Plantation Prisons.** Not all the southern states used the chain gang as the primary technique of convict labor. Some states, especially in the deep South, established huge prison plantations and farms to house and employ convicts not used on the roads. At the turn of the century, Texas and Mississippi had both purchased enough land to establish a farm-based system under state control. The new plantation system of these two states as well as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, and Louisiana became the model penal system of the South. The plantations were inexpensive to operate because facilities were minimal. At the same time, their high agricultural yield produced income for the states, offsetting a sizable proportion of the expense of maintaining correctional systems.

The plantation system was model in type only. The work was still from sunup to sundown. Guards and trustees rode the inmates no longer on the roads but in the fields. No longer shackled during work, the inmates were still
sometimes worked to death and often shot by guards or trustees during desperate escape attempts. Although white inmates worked on the chain gangs and later in the fields, the plight of the black prisoners had in reality not changed much after the Emancipation. Not only were the chain gangs primarily black, but blacks were also most often assigned to the most exhausting and back-breaking labor on the farms. Even though the 1930s through the 1960s is considered the era of rehabilitation in American corrections, it was not the case for the convicts of the South. No therapeutic treatment was given, and the prisoners were worked to exhaustion. Severe beatings were the fate of any prisoners who failed to produce their quotas in the fields. The abuses of the plantation system became even worse in the states which replaced paid correctional officers with armed "trusty" convicts. The "trusties" were typically long-termers, often in for homicide, and were even more brutal with the prisoners working in the fields than the earlier paid prison officers had been.

Plantation system prisons still exist. Hopefully, they are not as brutal as they have been historically. Even as late as 1971, though, Mark Carleton wrote that "... today, despite gradual alterations and nominal
progress, these institutions remain much as they were at the turn of the century and are thus penologically, socially and economically two generations out of date" (Carleton, 1971:87-88).

Concurring with Carleton's observations, both federal and state courts have intervened during the last decade, in order to bring both southern and northern prisons into the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1970s with Holt v. Sarver (Arkansas, 1970), and continuing into the 1980s with landmark cases such as Pugh v. Locke (Alabama, 1976) and Ruiz v. Estelle (Texas, 1980), courts have held that the "total conditions" of institutional life in these prison systems constitute cruel and unusual punishment, and the total prison systems are thereby in violation of the Eighth Amendment. In these three cases (among others), commonly known as "totality of conditions" or "big prison" cases, courts have declared "... that the basic conditions of confinement--food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, living, space, recreation, prison programs, and personal safety--are so inadequate that exposure to them constitutes cruel and unusual punishment for convicts ..." (Gottlieb, 1985:2-3).

The district judge who ruled on the Holt v. Sarver case of Arkansas declared that conditions and practices in the Arkansas prison system were "... so bad as to be
shocking to the conscience of a reasonably civilized people" (Holt v. Sarver, 1971). The Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, affirming Judge Johnson's decision which required Alabama to overhaul its prison system, sums up the mood of the court in such "totality of conditions" cases.

It is much too late in the day for states and prison authorities to think that they may withhold from prisoners the basic necessities of life, which include reasonably adequate food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, and necessary medical attention (Newman v. State of Alabama, 1977).

Specifically, all three states were ordered to dismantle the infamous trusty system (in Texas, the building tender system), in which some prisoners were given the power and authority of guards over their fellow inmates. Such a system was found to be corrupt and to lead to cruel and torturous punishment of the inmates. For instance, in Arkansas it was found that the trusties used a contraption called the "Tucker Telephone" which was attached to the limbs and genitals of inmates for the purpose of inflicting electrical shocks. In some instances, inmates died as a result of this punishment. Moreover, at the end of the 1960s, violence in the Arkansas prison system was reported to have involved 17 stabbings within an 18-month period, four of which were fatal (Murton, 1976).
Pugh v. Locke (Alabama, 1976) found conditions to be equally as bad in Alabama. The court described Alabama's prisons as having "a jungle atmosphere" where

. . . most prisoners carry some form of homemade or contraband weapon, which they consider necessary for self-protection. Shakedowns to remove weapons are neither sufficiently thorough nor frequent enough to significantly reduce the number of weapons. There are too few guards to prevent outbreaks of violence, or even to stop those that occur.

Furthermore, sanitary conditions were found to be deplorable as well in Alabama and Arkansas. The prisons in Alabama were overrun with roaches, flies, mosquitoes, and other vermin, any of which were likely to be found in the food.

The conditions in Arkansas and Alabama have sufficiently "shocked the conscience" of the courts and the public. Furthermore, one of the largest prison systems in the United States has also been found to be in "... violation of inmates' constitutional rights in six major areas: (1) overcrowding; (2) security; (3) fire safety; (4) medical care; (5) discipline; and (6) access to the courts" (Alpert, Crouch and Huff, 1984:295).

Specifically, Texas was ordered to stop putting three men in a cell, stop routinely housing two inmates in 45- and 60-square-foot cells, and reduce overcrowding in dormitories (Alpert et al, 1984:295). Additionally,
Texas, like Arkansas and Alabama, was ordered to dismantle its building tender system, which was similar to the trusty systems in other southern states. In essence, inmate guards were given official power over other inmates and in fact performed most traditional guard duties in the cell-blocks. Although atrocities such as the "Tucker Telephone" were not uncovered in Texas, building tenders were commonly known to severely beat other inmates, "... sometimes with homemade clubs ..." (Marquart and Crouch, 1985:564). Such beatings were administered for refusing to be quiet in the dayroom (the living area's TV and recreation room), stealing another inmate's property, or threatening another inmate (Marquart and Crouch, 1985:565).

In general, "totality of conditions" cases over the last seventeen years have forced many states to change the conditions of imprisonment for the better. Many states have had trouble meeting all directives of the courts, but most have taken significant steps towards compliance.

Considerable changes have been made in both southern and northern prisons. Sanitary conditions have improved, the trusty system has been eliminated, medical services and educational and vocational training programs have been improved, and physical punishment by the authorities has generally been eliminated in prisons in the United
States. All problems may not have been completely eliminated, but the general conditions of many prison systems have changed considerably, for the better. Yet certain changes have produced unanticipated consequences. In Texas, inmate-to-inmate violence has increased dramatically (Marquart and Crouch, 1985). In regards to the court-ordered elimination of the trusty system, critics have enjoined the courts to be more sophisticated in the implementation of their mandates. Alpert, Crouch, and Huff (1984) point out that the trusty system fulfilled a social control function which should have been recognized by the court. Part of the reason for the increased violence and disruption in the Texas Department of Corrections is the lack of a replacement for the social control function of the trusty system.

Most importantly, inmates have gained recognition by the courts. Such legitimate recognition will perhaps prevent prisons from ever reverting to the dungeons which they once were.

Although the South, in contrast to the North, certainly has had a different penal history, with the help of the courts, southern prisons have in some aspects become more humane.
CHAPTER IV
THE INMATE SUBCULTURE

Historically, laypeople and academics alike have been intrigued with what really goes on inside "the walls" and inside the minds of those imprisoned there. Both movies and popular literature dealing with prisons and the inmate experience hold great fascination for the public. *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, and *Brubaker* are just three of the many classic films dealing with the conditions of imprisonment from the inmate's viewpoint. From *My Life in Prison* (D. Lowrie, 1912) and *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* (R. E. Burns, 1932) in the early 1900's to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968), Malcolm Braly's *On the Yard* (1967), and Jack Abbott's *In the Belly of the Beast* (1982), inmates have fed the public's interest by writing about their prison experiences. Finally, the music written by prisoners, which is the subject of this research, has at different times achieved national standing on popular music charts.
Leadbelly, a famous blues artist of the 1930s, wrote many songs which emanated from his prison experience. "Midnight Special," which is "... based on the superstition that if the light of a train shines into a prisoner's cell at midnight he will soon be a free man," is just one of the many famous blues ballads which have emerged from the prison experience (Shaw, 1970:16). Furthermore, country music enthusiasts are just as familiar with Merle Haggard's first two number one hits, "Branded Man" and "I'm a Lonesome Fugitive," which were outgrowths of his criminal life and prison experiences at San Quentin.

Academicians also have tried to paint what might be called more accurate pictures of prisons and inmates through extensive case studies examining the language, social relationships, inmate subculture, race relations, and effects of the changing social and political environment of single prisons (Cardoza-Freeman, 1984; Carroll, 1974; Clemmer, 1940; Giallombardo, 1966a and 1966b; Hefferman, 1972; Jacobs, 1977; Sykes, 1958; Thomas and Peterson, 1977). Others concentrate on particular problems of prison, such as violence, homosexuality, psychological stress, victimization, and administrative practices (Bartollas, Miller, and Dinitz, 1976; Bowker,
Both popular and academic sources describe the informal social organization of inmates within prisons. This stratification system poses many different questions and begs answers concerning the inmate subculture. How does a social organization involving layers of keepers and kept emerge in prison? Is it a subculture unique or indigenous to the prison environment, which is largely shut off from the outside world; or are the norms, values, and beliefs brought into the prison from the outside? How does this subculture operate? Is it functional for the inmates and/or the administration? What is the nature of the inmate subculture? Is it purely a criminogenic culture which interferes with rehabilitation? How are inmates socialized in this structure? Why are inmates differentially socialized into this structure?

Two major models of inmate social organization have evolved from these research questions: (1) the deprivation model and (2) the importation model. The deprivation model assumes that the prison is a closed community, a total institution cut off from the outside world. Thus the existing inmate subculture inside the
prison is an adaptation to the deprivation and pains of imprisonment.

DEPRIVATION MODEL

Various sociologists have contributed to the ideas of the deprivation model. In order to understand this model, Goffman's work (1961) on total institutions, Clemmer's "prisonization" (1940), and Sykes' "pains of imprisonment" (1958) will be discussed.

Goffman's work on total institutions emphasizes both the structural arrangements of the prison and the psychological processes which enable a small number of keepers to maintain control over a large number of the kept. Clemmer's contribution is the importance of the primary group to the socialization or "prisonization" of the inmate into the prison subculture. Finally, Sykes points out that the inmate subculture arises as an adaptation to the deprivations experienced in incarceration. For Sykes, it is the "pains of imprisonment"—(1) loss of freedom, (2) loss of autonomy, (3) loss of material goods and services, (4) loss of heterosexual relationships, and (5) loss of physical security—which prompts inmates to develop an oppositional organization and normative structure.
The following overview of the deprivation model will first describe Goffman's structural characteristics of a total institution. These structural arrangements set up the conditions which result in the deprivations and "pains of imprisonment" and the resulting informal hierarchical organization of the inmates as described by Sykes (1958). As Clemmer points out, the subculture arises in the total institution and is sustained by the continuous prisonization processes of the new inmates. Finally, this review will include the rituals of degradations, mortifications, and stripplings, which predispose the inmate to the prisonization process and induction into the informal social organization of the prison society.

**Prison as a Total Institution**

Central to an understanding of the prison as a closed community is Goffman's analysis of total institutions. For Goffman, both structural arrangements and psychological processes regulate the incarcerated in a total institution and provide the conditions for the emergence of the inmate subculture. These structural arrangements will first be covered. The psychological processes will be included in the final section on the formal and informal rituals of degradation, mortification, and stripping.
The structural characteristics of a total institution are as follows: (1) symbolic barriers which regulate social interaction with the outside world, (2) the breakdown of the barriers which ordinarily separate the three spheres of sleep, work, and play, and (3) a bureaucratic organization which handles many human needs by grouping people together in large blocks.

Total institutions differ from other institutions, primarily in the degree of encompassing their members. This degree is "symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure" (Goffman, 1961a:4). There can be no question that prisons contain physical barriers to the outside world for the inmates. High brick walls, cyclone fences topped by razor wire, locked gates, and armed guards in the towers which surround these institutions are just some of the physical barriers. In many southern prisons of the plantation types, natural phenomena such as impassable rivers serve as the regulating barriers to the free world. The barriers not only keep inmates within the prison but also regulate the presence and frequency of visitors and outside people into the prison.

Beyond the physical barriers, however, the central feature of total institutions is the breakdown of barriers
which ordinarily separate the three spheres of sleep, work, and play. In prison, all aspects of the inmates' life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Each phase of the members' daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. All phases of daily activities are tightly scheduled with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next and the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and by a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfill the official aims of the institution (Goffman, 1961a:6).

An examination of the daily schedule of any prisoner would illustrate beautifully the regimentation in daily routine. All inmates are awakened at a certain time, eat at a certain time, and must be in their cells at certain times every day for the count.

According to Goffman, the key feature of total institutions is "the handling of many human needs by the bureaucratic organization of whole blocks of people" (Goffman, 1961a:6). The organization of large groups of people supervised by a small number of staff leads to a basic wide split between the staff and the managed inmates--the keepers and the kept. The prisoners live within the prison and have limited contact with the outside world. Although there is some claim that guards
are "doing time" just like the inmates, they are normally within the prison only 8-9 hours a day and are socially integrated into the outside world. There is also a social distance between the groups which is great and formally prescribed. Guards are not supposed to get too friendly with the inmates, because the inmates might take advantage of this familiarity, thereby weakening the power of the keepers.

The structural arrangement of the prison also has specific implications in the spheres of work and family for the inmate. Outside the prison, one's paycheck is spent mostly away from the workplace, particularly in domestic and recreational settings. Where and how one spends money is a private affair of the individual worker and a mechanism for keeping the authority of the workplace within strict boundaries. Within the institution, all basic needs are provided for the inmate; therefore, work doesn't have the same structural significance for the inmate as it has on the outside. Although prisons do pay the inmates for work, the amount is often so small it is insulting. Additionally, the only place to spend it is in the prison commissary, which has a limited range and supply of goods.

The nature of work within the prison is also different than work in the free world. A good job in
prison is one which helps the inmate to do time-- to make the time go faster and on occasion to give the inmate access to information or goods which can be traded within the inmate community. Additionally, prisons can be characterized at different points in history by too much work or too little work. Either situation leads to the demoralization of the inmate. In addition, the prison administration must provide different incentives for work inside. Up to the 1950s, it was often the whip which motivated the inmate-- or perhaps the fear of the whip. During the era of rehabilitation and indeterminant sentencing it was the hope of early release. However, in more recent years there have been more prisoners than work within the walls, and most inmates must learn to deal with either playing out a four-hour task into eight hours or long stretches of idle time with no work at all.

Finally, it is obvious that any family life is completely incompatible with the total institution of the prison. As researchers point out, the restricted interaction with family through letters and maybe weekly visits (if the inmate is lucky) is probably one of the most painful parts of being imprisoned (Cardoza-Freeman, 1984; Goodstein and Hepburn, 1985; and Hooper, 1985).
Prisons as total institutions have structural arrangements which regulate and supervise the incarcerated with symbolic and real boundaries. It is these structural arrangements which set up the conditions for deprivation and the pains of imprisonment and provide the foundation from which the inmate subculture emerges.

**Emergence of the Inmate Subculture**

What are the "pains of imprisonment"? According to Sykes and Messinger (1960), they are loss of freedom, loss of material goods and services, loss of autonomy, denial of heterosexual contact, and physical insecurity. McCorkle and Korn (1954) have added an additional deprivation: rejection by society. The development of the inmate culture and social organization is a functional response to the pains of imprisonment. Additionally, it is a collective response by the inmates.

Prisoners can never escape completely the impact of these deprivations but inmate solidarity is one means by which the pain may be reduced for the greatest number (Carroll, 1974:3). Inmates do not have the same outlets as people in the outside world to reduce the deprivations; there are few alternatives. They certainly cannot escape physically from their painful surroundings.

But if the rigors of confinement cannot be completely removed, they can at least be mitigated by the
patterns of social interaction established among the inmates themselves (Sykes, 1958:82, emphasis deleted).

What emerges is an inmate culture, the major characteristic of which is a normative code of solidarity. According to Gresham Sykes, this convict code requires the ideal inmate to behave according to the following five behavioral expectations: "Don't interfere with inmate interests"; "Don't lose your head"; "Don't exploit inmates"; "Don't weaken"; and "Don't be a sucker" (Sykes and Messinger, 1960:6-8). More specifically, "Do your own time"; "Don't rat or squeal on another inmate"; and "Don't interact with the guards or administration any more than is absolutely necessary."

The resulting hierarchical stratification of inmate roles is organized around these behavioral expectations. This normative system not only hierarchically orders the inmate roles but also functions to reduce the subjectively experienced pains of imprisonment. Although he is rarely found, it is the "real man" or the "right guy" who becomes the perfect, most respected convict among inmates. "The 'real man' is a prisoner who 'pulls his own time' . . . and he confronts his captors with neither subservience nor aggression. Somewhat aloof, seldom complaining, he embodies the inmates' version of decorum" (Sykes, 1966:102).
The more an inmate deviates from the normative dictum of the "real man," the lower his role in the inmate hierarchy. At the same time, however, the social roles allow the inmates to order their relations with one another, map their social worlds, and make the prison a meaningful environment.

Prisonization

It is in this closed community or total institution, impermeable to outside influence, that the inmate subculture arises as a functional response to the pains of imprisonment. The subculture is sustained by the continuous socialization or "prisonization" of the new inmates into the prison subculture. Prisonization, according to Donald Clemmer's study of the Illinois maximum security prison at Menard in the 1930s, is . . . the taking on in greater or less degree of the folkways, mores, customs and general culture of the penitentiary. Every man who enters the penitentiary undergoes prisonization to some extent . . . Acceptance of an inferior role, accumulation of facts concerning the organization of the prison, the development of somewhat new habits of eating, dressing, working, sleeping, the adoption of local language, the recognition that nothing is owed to the environment for the supplying of needs, and the eventual desire for a good job are aspects of prisonization which are operative for all inmates (Clemmer, 1958:299-300).

All inmates are prisonized to some degree. However, the more criminogenic aspects of prisonization influence
some men more than others. The major point made by Clemmer and assumed by most deprivation theorists is that the inmate subculture is a criminogenic one, one which interferes with rehabilitation.

Degradation Ceremonies

Predisposing inmates to prisonization is a ritual series of degradations, mortifications, and strippings that are part of the formal and informal induction into the prison. These rituals operate to not only shock the new inmate but also to extinguish pre-prison identities and impose a new identity, that of convict. Moreover, these processes are regulated and maintained not only by prison authorities but also by the other inmates.

The new convict identity is initially conferred through what Garfinkle (1956) calls a "degradation ceremony." In effect, the newly arrived prisoner is immediately stripped of the civilian concept of self and labeled as a prisoner, convict, or inmate. Incarceration itself presents this individual to the community inside and outside the walls as a deviant-inmate.

The official pronouncement of such a label can be interpreted to say, "I call upon all men to bear witness that he [the inmate] ... is not as he appears to be but is otherwise and in essence of a lower species" (Orenstein, 1985:178).
Upon arrival at the prison, the first-time offender is labeled a "fish" by the other inmates. Not only has the person been degraded to "inmate," which is one of the lowest statuses to be conferred on an individual in a free society, but the newly arrived first-time inmate is also relegated by other inmates to one of the lowest positions in the already low status system of inmate.

Additionally, the new inmate is no longer a father, brother, son, or husband but is primarily an inmate, with all the negative connotations associated with such a status. The deviant status of inmate becomes what is commonly called a master status, all other role relationships becoming subservient to that status.

Not only does the community or society so label the convict, but eventually, through the mortification processes, the inmate also sees himself as society does and takes on the label of inmate. The inmate is thus accordingly prisonized.

What are these mortification processes which so effectively destroy the civilian self and convince the inmate to assume a new deviant definition of self? According to Irving Goffman (1961), they are role dispossession, trimming or programming, dispossession of material property, personal defacement, and contaminative exposure. Garfinkle's degradation ceremony is just the
beginning of a long series of mortification processes described by Goffman.

Role Dispossession. Role dispossession automatically occurs as the inmate is separated from the outside world and the role relationships and schedules which were part of that world. As already stated, the inmate is no longer primarily a parent, child, spouse, or worker, but an inmate. This separation lasts not only around the clock but also as long as the inmate is incarcerated.

Initially, visitors may be completely banned, thereby ensuring a deep initial break with roles from the outside. Some roles can be reestablished upon return to the outside. However, others are irrevocably lost. It is not possible to make up later for the time not presently spent on getting an education, job advancement, courting, or rearing one's children.

One important type of role dispossession which prisoners experience is the legal aspect or "civil death." Not only do prisoners in some states temporarily lose the rights to make wills, "... write checks, ... contest divorce or adoption proceedings and the right to vote," but they also lose other rights permanently, unless pardoned (Goffman, 1961a:16).
Programming or Trimming. A further attack on the self takes place during the admission procedures.

Compiling life histories, taking photographs, weighing, fingerprinting, assigning a number, removing personal possessions, cutting hair, issuing institutional clothing, giving instructions about the rules and regulations of the institution, and assigning the inmate to a cell block are all part of what Goffman calls "trimming" or "programming" (Goffman, 1961a:16). During this process, data are compiled about the new prisoner so that the inmate can be "shaped and coded" into an object which can easily be fed into the administration machinery of the prison. Action based on ascriptive attributes ignores most of the previous basis of the inmate's self-identification and therefore chips away at the inmate's self (Goffman, 1961a:16).

In addition to this objectification by general attributes, during the initial squaring away, the staff often puts the newcomer through a series of obedience tests. It is thought that if the new inmates are taught that they must be deferential, they will be more manageable. If the inmate balks at any procedure during the initial screening process, that inmate is often quickly thrown into the "hole" as an example. Finally, as part of the trimming process, staff and inmates go out of
their way to welcome the new inmate. This welcome gives the new prisoners a clear picture of their plight. The newcomers are told that they are "fish"-- not only inmates but also of the lowest status in this already low status group of inmates (Goffman, 1961a:18).

**Dispossession of Property.** Inmates are not only programmed but are also initially stripped of their personal material possessions-- another chip at the self which entered the prison. Material goods are important to human beings because individuals invest self-feeling in possessions. New prisoners are literally stripped of their own clothing and issued uniforms. These clothes belongs to the institution, not to the inmate. Periodic cell searches and the confiscation of some accumulated personal property also add to and reinforce property dispossession. Finally, the most significant dispossession occurs with the removal of one's name as a method of identification and its replacement by a number (Goffman, 1961a-18:21).

**Personal Defacement.** Personal defacement takes place through the loss of the individual's "identity kit," which is also taken away during the admissions process. This one set of possessions has a special relation to self. When individuals appear before others, they expect to be
able to have control over the "guise" or "presentation of self." Cosmetics, shaving equipment, and clothing represent the tools or supplies of the "identity kit" which allows one to present the self in a particular manner to others. When the "identity kit" is taken away, one loses control over presentation of self. Additionally, humiliating body postures and verbal responses are required, adding to the attempted destruction of self and the enforcement of the inmates' low status in relation to the staff. Inmates are required to call guards "Sir." They must also ask for permission to make phone calls, get a cup of coffee, and for most other minor activities which are taken for granted on the outside. The inmates are also personally defaced by the indignities of treatment accorded them by others in the institution. Not only guards but also other inmates are likely to call the new inmates by profane names and use profane gestures in relation to them.

Finally, the inmate is engaged in a round of daily activities "whose symbolic implications are incompatible with conceptions of self. In prison, denial of heterosexual opportunities can induce fear of losing one's masculinity" (Goffman, 1961a:23). Additionally, make-work details can make men think their time and efforts are worthless.
Contaminative Exposure. The last step in the process of mortification is contaminative exposure. An individual can normally control the physical and psychological environment so that objects of self-feeling, one's body, immediate actions, thoughts, and some possessions are kept private from anyone else. At least they can be kept from being known or observed by strangers. The boundaries of the private self can be maintained on the outside. "But in prison these territories of the self are violated; the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned" (Goffman, 1961a:23).

When the inmate is admitted, all the information collected about him, particularly discreditable information, is put in a file that will be at the disposal of any staff member who wants to look. The inmates have no control over who can learn of their past disreputable behaviors. Later, individual or group confessions may be required in individual or group therapy. These confessions are part of the institution's program to alter the inmates' self-regulating tendencies. New and strange audiences not only learn discreditable facts about the inmate which are ordinarily concealed, but are also in a position to perceive some of this information directly.
Prisoners cannot prevent their visitors from seeing them in humiliating circumstances.

Security measures such as prison cages with bars for walls also expose the inmate physically. In prison one is never alone. The inmate is always within sight and earshot of someone else, even if it is only another inmate.

Goffman suggests that:

... not only does the inmate undergo mortification of the self by contaminative exposure of the physical kind: but this must be amplified-- when the agency of contamination is another human being, the inmate is in addition contaminated by forced interpersonal contact and in consequence, a forced social relationship (Goffman, 1961a:28).

Of the many examples of forced interpersonal contact that exist in the prison, only a few will be used to illustrate this part of the mortification process. The most dramatic of these may occur when the inmate is being processed into the prison. Depending on drug history, there may be a body cavity examination. This type of search may also follow a contact visit from the outside. The prisoners may feel mortified by having visitors see them as inmates, and the institution may add to this mortification by the strip search after the visit. Additionally, there may be personal and cell shakedowns (for probable cause). "In all these cases it is the searchers as well as the search that penetrate the private
reserve of the individual and violate the territories of . . . their selves" (Goffman, 1961a:29).

In sum, through the mortification processes of role dispossession, programming, dispossession of property, personal defacement, and contaminative exposure, the prison constantly works at eroding the civilian self, thereby keeping the inmates in their place, maintaining the inmate label, and ensuring prisonization. Because of the prisoner rights revolution, much of Goffman's analysis is more historic than current.

The Prison Subculture as Counterculture

Although the deprivation model portrays socialization into a pre-existing inmate culture, research supporting this model has largely shown prisoner populations to be organized as collectivities rather than into primary groups. Although Clemmer emphasized the importance of primary groups in "prisonization" processes, he stated that inmates are a highly individualistic type and are only a little less suspicious of one another than they are of the officials of the prison.

The prisoners do, however, recognize the need to cooperate with one another in light of the surroundings in which they find themselves. This relationship is a
symbiotic one, in which a mutual benefit exists for the parties involved. The prisoners, then, for Clemmer do not present a united front. They are not what Durkheim calls a type of mechanical society in which all the members think, behave, believe, and value the same things. They only form alliances because they need one another in the face of the realities and restrictions of prison life.

The deprivation model of imprisonment and "prisonization" present a picture of inmates and prisons close to the image depicted in popular films, literature, and music. The prison is a self-contained, total institution, completely cut off from the outside community. The inmates must learn the folkways and mores of this new and different world in which they are forcefully placed and maintained. This new world or convict subculture is a deviant criminal community. If convicts entering the prison do not have this criminal orientation to the world before they enter, many of them will most certainly learn this world view in order to survive in the inmate subculture. The convicts who become prisonized develop a strong consciousness of belonging to this inmate world. And this world is a world which is in direct opposition to the guards, the prison administration, and the outside society.
The inmate subculture is one which results as a pure adaptation to the total institution of confinement--prison--and the ensuing pains of imprisonment. It is perceived as not only a culture which is different and separate from the "free world" but also one which emerges only within the total institution of the prison, with little similarity to the outside culture or cult learn this world view in order to survive in the inmate subculture. The convicts who become prisonized develop a strong importation model, on the other hand, suggest that the oppositional inmate subculture is simply one which is a continuation of cultural patterns of behavior which are brought with the men into prison. John Irwin, a sociologist and ex-convict of the California penal system, criticized previous social scientists for over-emphasizing inside influences as explanations for the emergence of the inmate subculture. Drawing on Irwin's own personal experiences of prison, Irwin and Cressey (1963) claim that most of the inmate subculture is not one which is endemic only to the prison. Sociologists have believed the popular images of inmates and prisons and have only seen the criminal subculture. According to Irwin and Cressey, there are actually three types of prison subcultures, only two of which are criminal.
The first type, the "thief" subculture, refers to the patterns of values which are characteristic of professional thieves and other career criminals. This type is not only a criminal type but is also found outside the "walls" among police, college professors, students, and other categories of people who define "... behavior in terms of in-group loyalties" (Irwin and Cressey, 1963:142). The "convict" subculture, the second criminal type, can be characterized by the central value of utilitarianism, in which "... the most manipulative and most utilitarian individuals win the available wealth and such positions of influence as might exist" (Irwin and Cressey, 1963:148). This type is found in all places of incarceration "... characterized by deprivations and limitations of freedom and in them available wealth must be competed for by men supposedly on an equal footing" (Irwin and Cressey, 1963:142).

Finally, Irwin and Cressey discuss the legitimate subculture which is composed of inmates who isolate themselves or are isolated by other inmates. This group constitutes the largest proportion of the inmate population and presents no trouble to the staff. They reject both criminal and thief subcultures. They are "... oriented to the problems of achieving goals through
means which are legitimate outside prisons" (Irwin and Cressey, 1963:148).

Irwin and Cressey's work suggests that what is usually referred to as the inmate subculture is that which is composed of both the thief and convict subcultures. Historically, social scientists have ignored the legitimate subculture, but it is all three groups which constitute the culture of the prison community. In addition, all three groups bring to prison patterns of behavior and attitudes from past experiences, which are maintained within the prison. The inmate culture is really an "...adjustment or accommodation of these three systems within the official administrative system of deprivation and control" (Irwin and Cressey, 1963:130).

It should be noted that importation theorists do not dispute the existence of an inmate subculture with a hierarchy of interrelated roles, nor would they necessarily dispute the degradation or mortification processes of the institution. They recognize that there is a criminogenic subculture within prison but that it does not encompass all inmates. Many inmates are part of a legitimate or non-criminal subculture. Most importantly, the patterns of behavior and attitudes are imported into the prison with the inmate. They are not created completely anew within prison. Thus, the inmate
subculture is really a continuation of free world attitudes and behaviors inside a closed community.

INTEGRATION OF THE IMPORTATION AND DEPRIVATION MODELS

On a continuum, importation and deprivation theorists set themselves in diametrical opposition to one another, particularly regarding the nature of the inmate world and how it develops. However, more recent research of the inmate culture suggests that this subculture can best be explained by an integration of these two models. Charles W. Thomas' study (1977) at a maximum security prison in a southwestern state in 1970 shows the importance of an integration of both the deprivation and importation models.

Thomas' picture of the prison is not one of a closed, isolated community. It is not a closed system cut off from outside political, economic, and cultural orientations. To understand "prisonization" and the "inmate society," variables from both theoretical models are important.

One example of the integration of these models comes from Leo Carroll's study of race relations in an eastern prison. Carroll suggests that the deprivation model
. . . diverts attention from interrelationships between the prison and the wider society, . . . and hence, away from issues such as racial violence. Using just one of these models results in undue polarization. Rather than being contradictory, these models may in fact be complementary. Each may be a representation of the sources and form of inmate organization as it exists under different conditions (Carroll, 1974:5).

For Carroll, the form of inmate subculture is dependent upon the degree of security and deprivation in an institution. The higher level of security in a prison would be more likely to support the deprivation model.

Thomas' work also adds to an expansion of the possible explanations for the emergence of the inmate community. It is important to realize that inmates have a past, present, and future. Such variables as pre-prison experiences (both criminal and non-criminal), quality of contacts with persons or groups outside the walls (again criminal or non-criminal), expectations of prison staff and fellow inmates, immediate problems of adjustment that the inmate faces, and post-prison expectations are all important in explaining the inmate culture.

There is no single factor that causes the formation of an informal inmate system, whether highly oppositional and negativistic or relatively benign and responsive to the preferences of prison officials within the prison. Some narrow conceptualizations of prisons notwithstanding, inmates have a past, a future, and, not unimportantly, a present which is not exclusively tied to their position within the prison (Thomas, 1977:56).
In conclusion, however, Thomas does note that most prisons as organizations emphasize the control goals over rehabilitative ones, and they do so in a coercive manner. Reliance on coercive power is as common as to be one of the defining characteristics of the prison. In accord with Carroll, as the degree of coercion and the emphasis on control goals increase, "... the probability of a hostile, oppositional, and defiant inmate subcultural system emerging will greatly increase" (Thomas, 1977:58). The significance of external factors will be diminished and the options and alternatives open to inmates will be reduced.

In sum, two major theoretical models have developed to explain the emergence of and nature of the prison subculture. In light of the empirical evidence which has been generated to both support and critique these models, the best explanation probably lies in viewing these two models not in opposition to one another but as complementary models. It is both pre-prison socialization and the specific conditions of the incarceration experience which explain both the emergence of and the nature of the "prison society."

It should be noted that the original deprivation model was not such an inaccurate description of the inmate world when it was first described in Clemmer's "Prison
Community" as it now seems. That is, in the early part of this century, well into the 1960s, most prisons were closed, race-segregated, same sex communities, and total institutions which not only closely regulated the inmates' daily existence but also kept the "free community" out. Clemmer, Goffman, Sykes, and other subculture researchers of the deprivation school of thought were not so far off except for ignoring the non-criminal element in the subculture. However, both deprivation and importation theorists and many other subculture researchers previous to the 1970s did neglect a whole group of inmates in their portrayal of the prison community. Inmate subculture research had been devoted to the white inmate only. Black inmates had been ignored.

BLACK INMATE SUBCULTURE

Not until Leo Carroll's *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons* (1974) did black ethnicity become an important delineation for sociological inquiry of the prisons. Not unlike other disciplines, mainstream white sociologists had previously paid little attention to blacks in general and almost no attention to them in prison. Research about blacks in the United States had been limited to problems: integration, school segregation, and urban violence of the 1960s.
According to Leo Carroll (1974:1-2),

Research in race relations tends to be guided by a melioristic interest . . . As the spotlight of public attention has illuminated one problem after another the focus of research has shifted.

Various other speculations exist for the lack of attention to black inmates: geographical locations of the prison culture studies, biases of white researchers, segregation of the black inmates so that they had no power or status in the primary inmate subculture, and most likely a reflection of the overall societal discrimination and prejudice which in turn affected both the personal curiosity of researchers and the academic models which were used to examine the prison subculture. As research in race relations in general was guided by a problem orientation, it stands to reason that until blacks became a "problem" in prison, with their increasing power and numbers in the 1960s, researchers were not interested in them.

The following section will consider the above noted speculations against the data and research of the inmate subculture which existed previous to the 1970s. It is this researcher's contention that many of the arguments for disregarding the black inmate do not hold up.
Critique of Classical Inmate Subculture Research

It is true that many of the early subculture studies were conducted in northern prisons. Clemmer's research was conducted in Menard, Illinois, and Sykes' research was conducted in the New Jersey State maximum security prison. Many of the other classic works in the prison subculture have also been researched in northern and western prisons such as Washington State and California. One would think that since the research was conducted in the North, there were not large numbers of blacks imprisoned. Therefore, since their numbers were not large, black inmates would not as likely be part of the inmate subculture as white inmates. That, however, is not the case. It is true that southern prisons house a larger percentage of black inmates than northern prisons. At the end of the nineteenth century, southern prisons held 85-90% black inmates. In the early 1930s over 80% of the inmates in Angola, Louisiana, were black. At the same time the black population of Louisiana was only 40% (Franklin, 1976:198). However, in 1923 the U.S. Census Bureau reported that blacks formed 31.3% of the total prison population in the United States (Berry and Blassingame, 1982:235). Moreover, in Clemmer's Menard of the late 1930s, blacks represented 22% of the total prison population of 2,304.
At other times their representation was as high as 28% (Clemmer, 1940:43). A closely knit group comprising even 22% of a population could ideally be a powerful, influential part of the prison population. However, such was not the case, as evidenced by Clemmer's lack of attention to the black inmate.

Northern prisons have been generally classified as "Big Houses" by John Irwin. In the "Big House,"

Many prisoners were black or other nonwhite races, but most in the Big Houses outside the South were white. Racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation prevailed. Blacks were housed in special sections, in special cell blocks, or at least with cell partners of the same race; and blacks held menial jobs. By rule or informal patterns, blacks and whites sat in separate sections in the mess hall. In fact, in all facets of prison life, patterns of segregation and distance were maintained.

White prisoners kept blacks "in their place." They did not accept them as equals in the informal social life of the prison and directed constant hate and occasional violence at them (Irwin, 1980:9; researcher's emphasis added).

Irwin then justifies the lack of attention to the black inmate not only by the low percentage of their representation in the northern prison but also, consistent with his importation thesis, by the patterns of discrimination, segregation, and prejudice of the outside society which also existed within the prison.

Additionally, most researchers were white, middle class men of rural backgrounds and small-town Protestant morality. It appears that they may have been victims of
their own biases, both personal and academic. First of all, sociologists who studied prisons carried the theoretical and conceptual baggage which was current in the discipline at the time.

Although Donald Clemmer did mention that the black-white division was an important one within the prison community, this division did not impact his analysis. Influenced by the Chicago school, Clemmer saw the prison community as a culture which produced a social order peculiar to the prison. The most important concept which Clemmer used to examine the prisonization or socialization of inmates into the prison culture was the primary group. Even though blacks were segregated from white inmates in the prison, it does not logically follow that they could not have formed primary groups of their own. However, an examination of Clemmer's selection criteria for obtaining information about primary groups reveals the explanation for the omission of black primary groups. In order to study primary groups, Clemmer used three methods: schedules, questionnaires, and individual case studies of particular groups. It is important to realize that one of the selection factors for the subjects of the questionnaires was intellectual capacity. Only those who had at least average intelligence were given the
questionnaire, since it was assumed that persons of duller intellect would find difficulty in understanding the thoughts presented. Clemmer's classification of inmates by intelligence produced only 87 or 20.7% of the black inmates who had average or superior intelligence in his sample of respondents (1940:45). This selection criterion of sufficient intelligence excluded 45.5% of the total prison population. Yet less than half (41.5%) of the white inmates were excluded, as opposed to over three quarters (79.3%) of the black inmates. It is no wonder that in Clemmer's discussion of primary groups no mention of black ethnicity was noted as an important characteristic of the group. Only two blacks were included in his discussion of leadership roles of these primary groups. In Clemmer's "Prison Community" it was not only the theoretical baggage of his sociological training which precluded blacks. The use of the I.Q. tests of the 1930s, which are now known to have serious white middle-class biases, also pre-empted blacks from inclusion in the study. Since Clemmer's work was so influential in the field, his omission of the black inmate was not even noted until Leo Carroll's landmark study of racial relations in a maximum security prison in the late 1960s.
Carroll claims that before the emergence of black nationalism in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the delineation of race was not a significant variable within the prison community or subculture. Dependent upon the degree of social control within a prison, inmates were characterized either by a collectivity or by the development of primary groups. Even Carroll's overview seems to indicate that all inmates saw themselves as prisoners first and not as black or white first. One wonders, however, if black inmates saw white inmates as brother prisoners or if white inmates perceived blacks as brother prisoners before the ethnic distinction. John Irwin's previous description of the "Big House" suggests that this could not have been the case. Not only through the formal rules of the prison administration but also through the informal rules of the inmate subculture, blacks and whites were segregated from one another. It was not until the President's Commission of 1967 that prisons were urged to integrate the inmates. In addition, H. Bruce Franklin's analysis of prison literature in the United States points out that in fact blacks have historically been more likely to see themselves as a united group with common problems of discrimination in America, regardless of whether they are incarcerated. The justifications for the exclusion of the black inmate from
sociological studies of the inmate subculture do not hold up under close examination. Neither percentages of the population, nor numbers, nor academic theoretical baggage logically or ideally explain the neglect of the black inmate.

Black inmates constituted a significant percentage of prisoners, even in the North. In southern prisons they comprised an overwhelming majority. Even if black and white inmates were segregated from one another, there must have been an informal social organization among the black inmates themselves.

It is more likely that the omission of the black inmate has been a reflection of the overall societal discrimination and prejudice, which in turn affected both the personal curiosity of researchers and the academic models which were used to examine the prison subculture.

Delimitations of Folklore Research

In addition to the previous explanations for the neglect of the black inmate, one more explanation needs to be examined. In those cases when the occasional researcher was interested in the black inmate, it is logical to assume that the white researcher not only had trouble understanding the world of the black inmate but
also that the black inmate may have been more than reluctant to speak to or explain anything to the white researcher. Leo Carroll even had trouble gaining the confidence of the black inmates in the general population. He claims that the black leaders would talk to him from the beginning of the project but that the less influential black inmates were highly suspicious of him until he eliminated his connections with the white inmates within the prison. Additionally, folklorists who have always been interested in the black culture have also recently documented the difficulty in obtaining valid information from black respondents.

As a well-documented lyric from a black song puts it, "Got one mind for white folks to see, 'nother for what I know is me. He don't know, he don't know my mind." Blacks simply did not tell whites everything. Black folklorist Zora Neale Hurston also reveals this withholding of information from the white folks.

The white man is always trying to know somebody else's business. He can read my writing but he sure don't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say and sing my song (Hurston, 1977:xxi-xxii).

From one of the earliest collections of black folk music in the 1860s, Colonel Higginson realizes...
stanza about the typical white ("buckra") soldier: "be buckra 'list for money," but quickly break it off when they see Higginson (Franklin, 1978:88).

Fear also prompted black people not to reveal much information. When the folksong collector, a white stranger, appeared in the black neighborhood, there was always the concern that this person was potentially dangerous. Bruce Harrah-Conforth reports the following interview with Honeyboy, a blues singer from Mississippi now living in Chicago, about Honeyboy's encounter with Alan Lomax:

He drove up there in the yard one Monday mornin', on a Monday, and I was layin' there asleep, 'cause I never did tir myself with no farmin', he drove up in a brand new Hudson, '4 Hudson, supersix, pea green, that's right out of Washington D.C. He drove in the yard and this girl Annie come out, you know how colored people in the country, they get scared, different car, white people come up, different license plates on the car lookin' funny, they scared. He said "Honeyboy Edwards, I wannaspeak to him, I wannahave a talk with him," just like that, so she scared, see a strange white man, she said "I don't know where, he been here," she didn't know what to tell him, what not to tell him was the idea you know (Harrah-Conforth, 1983).

Reluctance, fear, and distrust by the black respondent do not account completely for the difficulty of obtaining reliable data from black informants and respondents. A lengthy historical and tightly held conviction that blacks are content with their place in American society has obscured the understanding and interpretation of the data which have been collected.
Although now generally accepted, folklorists have historically disputed the expression of protest in the words not only of spirituals but also other types of black folk music. Higginson was unable to accept the double meanings in the spiritual "We'll Soon be Free," even though some of them are slyly explained to him.

"De Lord will call us home," was evidently thought to be a symbolical verse; for as a little drummer-boy explained to me, showing all his white teeth as he sat in the moonlight by the door of my tent, "Dey tink de Lord mean for say de Yankees" (Franklin, 1978:90; underscored words are italicized in the original text).

Bruce Harrah-Conforth (1983:4) also suggests that "Black protest about white society was probably unpleasant at best to early scholars that might have happened upon it," thereby affecting "... their decisions to either include or exclude protest songs in their collections."

Even collectors such as John Lomax did not recognize protest songs when they saw them. Lomax committed perhaps a worse mistake by mislabeling the protest as self-pity. Beyond not even recognizing protest, the following quote reveals that Lomax did not even understand why the black should express self-pity:

Why this is true is difficult to say. There surely exists no merrier-hearted race than the negro, especially in his natural home, the warm climate of the south. The negro's loud laugh may sometimes speak the empty mind, but at the same time it reveals
a nature upon which trouble and want sit but lightly (Lomax, 1917).

In sum, sociologists and criminologists have ignored and folklorists in some cases have misinterpreted blacks in general and the black inmate in particular. Nevertheless, granted the problems in the interpretation of black folk music by white researchers, folklorists did take an interest in the black inmate. Folklorists were not particularly interested in the inmate as such, but prison facilitated the collection of large amounts of folk music at once. Folklorists have historically been interested in any music of the blacks, not because it was prison music but because the folk music of the blacks was an expression of the black culture. Early folklorists visited southern prisons because these prisons had large populations of blacks, thereby making the folklorists' research easier. Generally, folklorists collected music of both white and black people, but the 1939 field notes of Alan Lomax reveal that they went to the prisons for black folk music and to the parlors or living rooms of white people for white folk music (Lomax, 1939). The large body of music which has been collected from and about black inmates in the South thus allows an examination of the conditions and experience of incarceration for the black inmate before the 1970s.
sociological and criminological interest. Therefore, the examination in Chapter VI of folk music collections from both jails and prisons will help to rectify the omissions of other disciplines. It is also from this body of data that one can attempt a reconstruction of the inmate subculture including the black inmate.

CONTEMPORARY PRISON SUBCULTURE

Since the 1970s, prisons have gone through major changes. Integration of black and white inmates, the conviction and imprisonment of black militant leaders, increasing numbers of black inmates, legislation requiring increased prisoners' rights, and changes in the criminal types of inmates have all interacted to create a much different type of inmate subculture. During the 1970s and 1980s, inmates have grouped themselves primarily on the basis of race and ethnic identity. They

. . . are divided by extreme differences, distrust and hatred. A multitude of criminal types--dope fiends, pimps, bikers, street gang members and very few old time thieves--assert themselves and compete for power and respect (Irwin, 1980:181).

However, the prison is not a war of all against all. The inmate subculture of the 1980s is a much more complex arrangement of the interaction between these various groups and types. In addition, it is an inmate subculture
influenced by both free world forces and the conditions of the prison as a total institution. It is a picture which can best be explained by a combination of both the deprivation and importation models.

In general, however, prisons are still total institutions. They are primarily same sex communities. Prisoners still lose many rights and suffer "civil death." Physical and psychological barriers still regulate the flow between the prison and the free world. All daily activities are conducted in the same physical geographical place with large numbers of other people. The barriers between work, sleep, and play do not exist. Inmates still have little or no autonomy. Most importantly, prisoners still suffer the deprivations, the "pains of imprisonment."

Most inmates do not know how bad prisons used to be. It is only the long-term inmate who can recall the past and observe how much better prisons are today in comparison to yesteryear. The contemporary inmate of the 1980s can only compare prison existence to free world existence. Prison thus falls short and remains a place of great deprivation.
CHAPTER V

ANGLO-AMERICAN MUSIC OF THE INCARCERATED

As noted before, the birth of the American prison system is most often cited as occurring in 1790 with the conversion of one wing of the Walnut Street Jail into a penitentiary. This conversion marked the beginning of imprisonment as the primary form of punishment in the United States. In the history of incarceration, however, jails were the first places of confinement for criminals in the United States.

Jails originated around 1607 and were primarily used for pretrial and pre-execution centers. They were also used to incarcerate misdemeanants and others who were not able to pay fines or debts.

Before Emancipation, the occupants of early American jails and prisons were white men. Most black men and women were still slaves, and when necessary, their punishments and executions were taken care of by their owners. Although some white women were tried and executed for crimes in the early years of the United States, as is
the case now, it was predominantly the men who were arrested, convicted, and punished accordingly. ¹ Therefore, since it was predominantly poor whites who filled the earliest jails and prisons of the United States, this work will begin with an examination of Anglo-American music of the incarcerated.

Beginning with the folk ballads which arose from the jails of the 1800s, this chapter will include the various styles, functions, and themes of the music of the white prisoner over time. In order to handle data over a more than 100-year span, Anglo-American songs of the incarcerated will be presented first chronologically and then by style, function, and theme.

Since jails were the first places of imprisonment in the United States, some of the earliest American music of the incarcerated was written by those detained in jail.

The earliest documentation of the experience of incarceration for American prisoners is provided in a

¹ Ann Jones (1981:f.n. 48:346) claims that black women were probably not often executed because they were valued as property. It stands to reason that male slaves also were only executed in rare instances, although beatings were common and sometimes resulted in death. Moreover, the male slave could be executed more often than the female since the female was the source of continuous labor in her offspring. It only took a few men to impregnate the women, who were more valuable for reproduction purposes than the men.
large body of Anglo-American folk ballads called pre-execution ballads or "criminal goodnights." First, however, it is important to understand what a folk ballad is and the type of ballads from which "criminal goodnights" or pre-execution ballads were derived.

FOLK BALLADS

The ballad of Anglo-American folk tradition is

... a short, traditional, impersonal narrative told in song, transmitted orally from generation to generation, marked by its own peculiar structure and rhetoric, and uninfluenced by literary conventions (Friedman, 1956:xii).

Not all varieties of ballads are sung, but when they are, the words are more important than the music; the main purpose of a ballad is to tell a story.

Most important to the experience of incarceration, however, are the broadside ballads. Early English settlers brought to the United States the tradition of printing ballads on a single sheet of paper

... about the size of a handbill, called a broadsheet or broadside. Below the title appeared a line advising that the ballad was to be sung "to the tune of ..." (specifying a popular melody known to everyone) (Friedman, 1956:xxvi).

The content of broadsides has been likened to the sensationalistic content of The National Enquirer. Not surprisingly, the whole genre of "criminal goodnights" or
pre-execution ballads was derived from the broadsides. Legend and documentation has it that prisoners awaiting the hangman's noose were wont to put down descriptions of their thoughts and emotions. There have been many variants of these ballads found in places as far apart as Wyoming, North Carolina, Nova Scotia, and Texas.

Pre-Execution Ballads and Criminal Goodnights

Pre-execution ballads are generally confessions. They describe the criminal act, most often a murder of a lover or spouse (more often the male killing the female); the circumstances leading up to the act (men killing women because they get pregnant, because they won't marry them, because the men don't want to marry them, or because of jealousy); the convict worrying about the family members who will be left behind to mourn and bear the shame; and finally, the convict accepting the just punishment for the horrendous act committed. These ballads also often contain a moral, the moral in this case being: "Don't make the same mistake I did." (This is perhaps an attempt at deterrence.) Finally, the criminal blames him/herself as an individual. Conviction and imminent execution have resulted from individual mistakes. Pre-execution ballads
have been documented from the early 1800s until the present century (Burt, 1958; Teeters, 1967; Cox, 1925; Belden and Hudson, 1952; Friedman, 1977; and Lomax and Lomax, 1947 and 1966).

One of the earliest documented pre-execution ballads was sung by the convicted Frankie Silver before her execution in Morganstown, North Carolina on July 12, 1833. Court records of the trial reveal that Frankie Silver was 

"... the only white woman and with the exception of one negress, the only woman ever capitally punished in North Carolina after it assumed the status of statehood."

According to persistent and, it would seem, undisputed tradition, before the hangman adjusted the slipnoose, Frankie read or recited from the gallows a confession in verse of own composition (Brown, 1952a:699-700).

Although her ballad, "I Try That Awful Road," was written by a woman, that is the only element which differs from the typical pre-execution ballad.

The jealous thought that first gave strife
To make me take my husband's life.
For days and months I spent my time
Thinking how to commit this crime.

And on a dark and doleful night
I put his body out of sight;
With flames I tried him to consume
But time would not admit it done.

Judge Donnell has my sentence passed;
These prison walls I leave at last;
Nothing to cheer my drooping head
Until I'm numbered with the dead.
But O that dreadful judge I fear;  
Shall I that awful sentence hear?  
'Deport, ye cursed, down to Hell,  
And forever there to dwell.'

Then shall I meet that mournful face  
Whose blood I spilled upon this place,  
With flaming eyes to me he'll say,  
'Why did you take my life away?'

His feeble hands dropped gently down.  
His chattering tongue soon lost its sound.  
[Two lines missing]

My mind on solemn subjects rolls,  
My little child-- God bless its soul;  
All you that are of Adam's race  
Let not my faults this child disgrace.

Farewell, good people, now you see  
What my bad conduct brought on me;  
To die of shame and of disgrace  
Before this world of human race.

Great God, how shall I be forgiven?  
Not fit for earth; not fit for heaven.  
But little time to pray to God,  
For now I try that awful road.

(Burt, 1958:17-18)

Frankie first confesses what led up to the crime;  
jealousy made her take her husband's life. She worries  
about the stigma of her crime and execution affecting her  
child.

My little child-- God bless its soul;  
All you that are of Adam's race  
Let not my faults this child disgrace.

Frankie warns the crowd awaiting her execution:
Farewell, good people, now you see
What my bad conduct brought on me;
To die of shame and of disgrace
Before this world of human race.

Frankie Silver not only confesses publicly what she did and why she did it, but also blames herself as an individual: it was her own bad conduct that brought her ". . . to die of shame and of disgrace."

In another ballad, for the murder of James A. Garfield, President of the United States, Charles J. Guiteau, the assassin, was hung at Washington, D. C., June 30, 1882 (Teeters, 1967:395). Before Guiteau's execution, he insisted on reading some crude doggerel that he had composed that morning in his cell which, as he said, "indicated my feelings at the moment of leaving this world," and "if set to music might be rendered effective." He described them as that "of a child babbling to his mama and papa." Here they are as delivered by Guiteau on the scaffold:

I am going to the Lordy
I am so glad,
I am going to the Lordy
I am so glad,
Glory, hallelujah, Glory hallelujah!

(Teeters, 1967:395-396)

It is also thought that Charles Guiteau wrote the following ballad while in prison awaiting his execution.

Come all you tender Christians, wherever you may be,
And likewise pay attention to these few lines from me.
For the murder of James A. Garfield
I am condemned to die
On the thirtieth day of June upon the scaffold high.
My name is Charles Guiteau,
My name I'll ne'er deny.
I leave my aged parents
In sorrow for to die.
But little did they think,
While in my youthful bloom,
I'd be taken to the scaffold
To meet my earthly doom.

'Twas down at the station I tried to make my escape,
But Providence being against me,
there proved to be no show.
They took me off to prison while in my youthful bloom
To be taken to the scaffold to meet my earthly doom.

I tried to [play off] insane
but found it ne'er would do,
The people were all against me,
to escape there was clue.
Judge Cox, he read my sentence,
his clerk he wrote it down,
I'd be taken to the scaffold to meet my earthly doom.

My sister came to see me, to bid a last farewell.
She threw her arm around me and wept most bitterly.
She says, "My darling brother,
this day you must cruelly die
For the murder of James A. Garfield
upon the scaffold high."

(Friedman, 1977:231-232)

Similar to the writers of other pre-execution
ballads, Guiteau confesses that he killed James A.
Garfield, for which he is condemned to die. He also
mentions his aged parents and his sister who comes to see
him the day of his execution. This ballad has a modern
note, however, with his admitting to making an insanity
plea.
Another criminal confession, concerning a crime reported to have occurred around the 1850s, is "McAfee's Confession."

Draw nigh, young men, and learn from me
My sad and mournful history,
And may you ne'er forgetful be
Of what this day I tell to thee.

Before I reached my fifth year,
My father and my mother dear
Were both laid in their silent grave
By Him who them their beings gave.

But Providence, the orphan's friend,
A relief did quickly send,
And snatched from want and penury
Poor little orphan McAfee.

Beneath my uncle's friendly roof,
From want and danger far aloof,
Nine years was I most tender reared,
And oft his kind advice I heard.

But I was thoughtless, young and gay,
And sometimes broke the Sabbath day,
In wickedness I took delight,
And oftentimes did what was not right.

And when my uncle would me chide,
I'd turn away dissatisfied,
And join again my wickedness,
And Satan serve with eagerness.

At last there came the fatal day
When from my home I ran away,
And to my sorrow since in life,
I took unto myself a wife.

And she was kind and good to me
As any woman need to be,
And now alive would be no doubt,
Had I ne'er seen Miss Hettie Shout.
O, well I recollect the day
When Hettie stole my heart away;
'Twas love for her controlled my will,
And caused me my wife to kill.

'Twas on a pleasant summer night,
When all was still, the stars shone bright,
My wife was lying on the bed,
When I approached and to her said:

"Dear wife, here's medicine I brought,
Which for your sake this day I bought,
And I do hope it will cure you,
From those vile fits; pray, take it, do."

She gave to me a tender look
And in her mouth the poison took;
Then by her babe upon the bed
Down to her last long sleep she laid.

But, fearing that she was not dead,
My hand upon her throat I laid,
And there such deep impressions made,
Her soul soon from her body fled.

Then as my heart filled full of woe,
I cried, "O, whither shall I go?
Or how to quit this mournful place,
The world again how can I face?"

I'd freely give up all my store,
Had I ten thousand times much more,
If I could bring again to life
My dear, my darling murdered wife.

Her body lies beneath the sod,
Her soul I hope is with its God,
And soon into eternity,
My guilty soul will also be.

The moment now is drawing nigh
When from this world my soul must fly,
To meet Jehovah at the bar,
And there my final sentence hear.

Young men, pray take advice from me,
And shun all evil company;
Walk in the ways of righteousness,
And God your soul will surely bless.
Kind friends, I bid you all adieu;
No more on earth shall I see you;
On heaven's bright and flowery plain
I hope we all shall meet again.

(Cox, 1925:192-194)

All the verses are included here so that the reader may obtain a full appreciation for the structure and length of the traditional ballad. This ballad also includes all the elements of a typical "criminal goodnight" or pre-execution ballad. McAfee begins with a warning to the young people not to imitate him. He then proceeds to develop his social background as an orphan. He had been taken in by a friendly uncle, but alas, McAfee was thoughtless, young, and wicked. He then married but met another woman who stole his heart away. As is typical in many of these ballads, the male then simply murdered the woman (the wife in this instance) he did not want anymore. He tells how he poisoned her and then strangled her for good measure. Immediately, at least in retrospect now that he has been caught and convicted and is awaiting execution, he was sorry for what he did. Note that McAfee takes responsibility for his crime. It was not the fault of his friendly uncle who had reared him tenderly. Yet Miss Hettie Shout did steal his heart away. It was love for her that controlled his will. His crime was not the
fault of his upbringing but the fault of a woman; women are often blamed for leading men astray. Finally, McAfee warns young men to take the following advice:

. . . shun all evil company;
Walk in the ways of righteousness,
And God your soul will surely bless.

Perhaps one of the most famous and well-known of all pre-execution ballads is "Tom Dula's Lament," more commonly known as "Tom Dooley," which was sung by contemporary folksingers of the 1960s. Legend and documentation has it that Tom Dula, tried and convicted of murdering one of his mistresses, Laura Foster, was really protecting his other mistress, Ann Melton. Tom Dula was executed on May 1, 1868. Local legend attributes the following ballad and other similar pieces to Dula himself.

Oh, bow your head, Tom Dooley;
Oh, bow your head and cry;
You have killed poor Laury Foster
And you know you're bound to die.

You have killed poor Laury Foster;
You know you have done wrong;
You have killed poor Laury Foster,
Your true love in your arms.

I take my banjo this evening;
I pick it on my knee;
This time tomorrow evening
It will be of no use to me.

This day and one more;
Oh, where do you reckon I'll be?
This day and one more,
And I'll be in eternity.
I had my trial at Wilkesboro;  
Oh, what do you reckon they done?  
They bound me over to Statesville  
And there where I'll be hung.

The limb being oak  
And the rope being strong—  
Oh, bow your head, Tom Dooley,  
For you know you are bound to hang

O pappy, O pappy,  
What shall I do?  
I have lost all my money,  
And killed poor Laury too.

O mammy, O mammy,  
Oh, don't you weep, nor cry;  
I have killed poor Laury Foster  
And you know I am bound to die.

Oh, what my mammy told me  
Is about to come to pass:  
That drinking and the women  
Would be my ruin at last.

(Friedman, 1977:229-230)

"Tom Dooley" is also typical of pre-execution ballads. Tom Dula not only agonizes about the separation from his family, but also shows concern about the pain he caused his mother. Additionally, he blames not only drinking but also "women" for his getting into trouble. Tom Dula was lured into crime not by one woman but by two. Finally, he blames himself in the long run. He had ignored his mother's good advice. The fault is solely his own, not the result of belonging to an oppressed class.
Although most pre-execution ballads illustrate confessions and penitence for the murder which was committed, not all of them do so. William S. Shackleford (alias J. P. Davis) confessed but insisted to the end that he had killed John D. Horton in self-defense with a bootjack. Yet the jury did not believe him, and he was sentenced to be hung in March 1890. However, upon exhumation of Horton's body, it was found that Horton had indeed been killed by a bootjack. The following ballad was written by Shackleford after his trial, while awaiting execution. It is clear that he maintained self-defense to the very end.

Though I am doomed to be hanged,
   In March, on the twenty-eighth day,
I fear not the dreadful pang,
   Nor the new and uncertain way.

Could I feel that I had done wrong,
   In that I slew my friend,
How different now would be my song,
   How bitter to me would be the end!

Though sorrow bears me to the ground,
   'Tis not that I feel a murderer's guilt,
But that I had to strike him down,
   And then the blood of my friend was spilt.

I was hemmed in and upon my bed,
   While he stood between me and the door,
And with the gun presented at my head,
   I listened for the fearful roar.

But fortunately it came down with a whack,
   And as he turned to the wall for a shell,
I stooped down, took up the little old boot-jack
   And struck him two blows and he fell.
Though he had fallen I feared to remain,
    So I escaped to the yard below;
But becoming alarmed I entered again
    To see the result of the blow.

My God, my God, what a fearful sight
    I beheld as I stood in the door,
The spirit of my friend taking its flight,
    While he lay in his blood on the floor.

I took him to the new barn closet,
    Where I laid his body by;
For well I knew to expose it
    Would be by lynchers' hands to die.

So when I had fulfilled his last request,
    And obeyed his latest command,
I laid him in his grave to rest
    And started for the river Dan.

Not that I hoped he would long remain
    Crouched in this narrow space,
But that he might be found again
    And interred in a more befitting place.

And when I had decided upon a land
    Of temporary refuge to me,
I went to Edwards, a neighbor man,
    And said, if wanted, where I would be.

How clearly now to my mind the mistake
    I made in this unhappy affair!
I might have gone to the sheriff of Wake
    And been taken into custody there.

This God knows I did not know,
    But thought it all for the best
To some adjoining country to go
    And wait there for my arrest.

Is there no truth to all I say?
    Hear what the Judge has said,
In March, on the twenty-eighth day,
    He shall hang by the neck till dead!

(Brown, 1952a:679-680)
In addition, a few convicts maintained innocence right to the very end, as illustrated in the following ballad.

Ellen Smith

Come all you kind people my story to hear,
What happened to me in June of last year,
Of poor Ellen Smith and how she was found,
Shot through the heart lying cold on the ground.

'Tis true I'm in jail a prisoner now,
But God is here and hears every vow.
Before Him I promise the truth to relate,
And tell all I know of poor Ellen's sad fate.

The world of my story has long known a part,
And knows I was Ellen's own loving sweetheart;
And while I would never have made her my wife,
I love[d] her too dearly to take her sweet life.

I saw her on Monday before that sad day;
They found her poor body and buried it away.
My heart was quite broken; I bitterly cried
When friends gently told me how Ellen had died.

That she had been killed never entered my mind
Till the ball through her heart they happened to find.
Oh, who was so cruel, so heartless and base
As to murder sweet Ellen in that lonesome place?

I saw her that morning, so still and so cold,
And heard the wild story the witness told.
I choked back tears when the people all said
That Peter Degraff had shot Ellen dead.

Half crazy with sorrow, I wandered away,
And lonely I wandered for many a day,
My love in her grave and her hands on her breast,
While bloodhounds and sheriffs would give me no rest.

They said I was guilty and ought to be hung;
The tale of my crime was on everybody's tongue.
They got their Winchesters and hunted me down,
But I was far away in Mt. Airy town.
I stayed off one year and prayed all the time
That the man might come back that committed the crime,
So I could come back and my character reveal;
But the flowers had faded on poor Ellen's grave.

I came back to Winston my trial to stand,
To live or to die, as the law may demand.
McArthur may hang me, my fate I don't know;
But I'm clear of the charge that is laid at my door.

Ellen sleeps calmly in the lonely graveyard,
While I look through the bar, and God knows it's hard.
I know they will hang me at last if they can,
But God knows I die an innocent man.

My soul will be free when I stand at the bar,
Where God tries his cases, and there like a star
That shines through the night shall my innocence be.
O love, I appeal to the justice of time.

(Brown, 1952a:714-715)

Criminal Goodnights: Prison, Not Execution

"As capital punishment became rarer, the criminal of
the goodnight ballad took leave of the world in a
different sense. He (she) was on the point of . . .
going off to serve a long prison term" (Friedman,
1977:220). The convicted criminals in the following
texts, "The Boston Burglar," "Logan County Jail," and
"Court House," are leaving this world to enter the world
of the imprisoned.
The Boston Burglar

I was born in the town of Boston,
A town you all know well,
Raised up by honest parents--
The truth to you I will tell--
Raised up by honest parents,
Raised up most tenderly,
Until I became a sporting man
At the age of twenty-three.

My character was taken
And I was sent to jail.
The people tried, but all in vain,
To keep me out on [bail].
The juror found me guilty,
The clerk he wrote it down,
The judge he passed the sentence
To send me to Charlestown.

They put me on the east-bound train
One cold December day,
And every station I would pass
This is what they would say:
"There goes the Boston burglar;
His arms in chains are bound.
'Tis for some crime or other
They have sent him to Charlestown."

There was my aged father
A-standing at the bar,
Likewise my dear old mother
A-tearing down her hair,
She was tearing down her old gray locks
And trembling, as she said,
"My son, my son, what have you done
To be taken to Charlestown?"

There lives a girl in Boston,
A girl that I loved well.
If ever I gain my liberty
It's with that girl I'll dwell.
If ever I gain my liberty
There are two things I'll shun:
That being a night street walker
And drinking of the rum.

(Friedman, 1977:222-223)
Logan County Jail

When I was a little boy, I worked on Market Square,
O money I did pocket, but I never did it fair.
I rode upon the lakes and learned to rob and steal,
And when I made a great haul, how happy I did feel!

I used to wear the white hat, my horse an' buggy fine;
I used to court a pretty girl,
   I always thought was mine.
I courted her for beauty, her love for me was great,
And when I'd go to see her,
   she'd meet me at the gate.

One night as I lay sleeping,
   I dreamed a mighty dream,
That I was marching down on the golden stream,
I awoke all broken-hearted, in Logan County jail,
And not a friend around me for to go my bail.

Down came the jailer about ten o'clock,
And with the key in his hand
   he shoved against the lock:
"Cheer up, cheer up, my prisoner!"
   I thought I heard him say,
"You're going around to Moundsville,
   seven long years to stay."

Down came my true-love, ten dollars in her hand:
"O my dearest darling, I've done all that I can!
And may the Lord be with you, wherever you may go,
And Satan snatch the jury for sending you below!"

Sitting in the railroad, waiting for the train,
I am going away to leave you,
   to wear the ball and chain.
I'm going away to leave you; darling, don't you cry;
Take a glass of whiskey and let it all pass by.

(Cox, 1925:213)

The previous text of "The Boston Burglar" exhibits many elements of the typical "criminal goodnight" ballad. The criminal worries about his parents and the shame they
must endure because of his criminal behavior. He mourns the girl in Boston who he loved well and will return to if he ever gets out of prison. Finally, "The Boston Burglar" takes individual responsibility for the crime he has committed. Friedman (1977:222) notes that the above text implies "... a long train ride between the Boston courthouse and the state penitentiary at Charlestown, when actually the distance could only be a matter of a few city blocks." However, from the perception of the inmate, the distance from the courthouse--freedom--to the prison--incarceration--is symbolically a long trip.

In "Logan County Jail" the prisoner confesses to his previous deviant lifestyle that led him to prison. Again the prisoner admits guilt and takes full responsibility for such a deviant lifestyle. There are no allusions to any sources that caused him to lead such a life. He mourns leaving his true love. He is going away to leave her--"... to wear the ball and chain."

Court House

In New York City I first seen the light,
Brought up by good parents in the pathway of right.
I became an orphan at the age of ten years,
On Mother's grave I shed many tears.

I had scarcely reached manhood
when I left my old home,
With a few of the fellows to the west we would roam,
Seeking employment, we scarcely could find,
The pay was so poor and the people unkind.
In St. Louis city we first met our fate,  
We were arrested while walking the street.  
The charges were burglary, the theft it was small.  
They said, "We will place you behind a stone wall."

We were marched next morning  
to the courthouse for trial.  
My pal was downhearted, so I gave him a smile.  
We pleaded for mercy, but were shown none at all,  
They gave us twenty years behind a stone wall.

We were handcuffed next morning  
and marched to the pen.  
We arrived at midnight with a few other men.  
The door was thrown open, and we marched in the hall  
To learn to be convicts behind a stone wall.

While lying at night on a pallet of straw,  
I swore I would never again break the law.  
There's none but your mother to bear your downfall  
When you are a convict behind the stone wall.

Come all you young fellows and listen to me,  
When you lose life's pleasure you have lost liberty.  
I've tasted life's pleasure, it's bitterer than gall,  
It will give you a cell behind the stone wall.

(Warner, 1984:277-278)

The convict of the "Court House" also reveals the  
crime of burglary which led him to imprisonment.  
Additionally, he worries about his mother who will "...  
bear his downfall." Finally, in true ballad style, he  
warns other young men about the loss of liberty "...  
behind the stone wall."

Pre-execution ballads in general do not describe the  
particular conditions of the jail in which the inmate is  
incarcerated. However, they do give some insight as to
what was going on inside the prisoner's mind. They do
tell us that the inmate is worried about the family and
loved ones left behind. Sometimes, as in Frankie Silver's
"I Try That Awful Road," the inmate is worried about the
fate of a child; in other ballads such as "Tom Dooley" and
"The Boston Burglar," the inmate is worried about the
shame his parents have to bear. Additionally, these
particular ballads present a picture of the processes of
repentance and the attempts of the convicted prisoners to
get their spiritual lives in order, so that they may still
possibly reach heaven-- although Frankie Silver wonders if
she will.

Finally, as in much Anglo-American music, the
convicted prisoner's song reflects Protestant
individualism. The condemned inmate stands alone before
God and blames him/herself for the crime. There is no
sociological explanation for the crime. The convict is
portrayed as one who is different and separate from other
human beings. The composer of the pre-execution ballad is
set before the community as a specimen, a deviant example,
not as one who is part of the group. The condemned
criminal says, "Do not imitate me! If you do, you will
end up like me-- facing the hangman's noose, firing squad,
or in later years, the electric chair or a lifetime in
prison."
Folk Song from Jails

By the nineteenth century, however, jails were not only used for pre-detention and pre-execution purposes but also, in many southern states which maintained county control, for implementing the punishment of imprisonment. As is the case now, short-term sentences were often served in jail rather than at the state prison. Throughout the last hundred years or more, hobos, moonshiners, vagrants, and now in the twentieth century, marijuana users and DWIs, often receive jail sentences for over-night or short terms such as 10, 30, or 90 days. Jails in more contemporary times then often house the less serious offenders. Before the recent harsher penalties for drunk driving, it was not unusual at all for jails to be used as places where the drunk spent a night just to sober up, and no charges were made at all. From the times of the moonshiners and bootleggers to more contemporary DWIs, those who imbibe too much alcohol are likely to see the other side of the bars, and folk songs illustrate this cause of imprisonment.

The following excerpt from "Hallelujah, Bum Again" reveals that hobos were jailed not only for illegally riding the boxcars but also for imbibing too much.
Perhaps they purposely let themselves get caught in the winter so they would have a warm place to sleep.

Oh, I ride box cars and I ride fast mails, When it's cold in the winter I sleep in the jails.

I passed by a saloon and I hear someone snore, And I found the bartender asleep on the floor.

I stayed there and drank till a fly-mug came in, And he put me to sleep with a sap on the chin.

Next morning in court I was still in a haze, When the judge looked at me, he said, "Thirty days!"

Some day a long train will run over my head, And the sawbones will say, "Old One-Finger's dead!"

(Botkin, 1983:882)

According to Carl Sandburg (1927:214), a Chicago newspaperman found himself in the Portland County Jail for ten days in order to recover from a bootleg hangover. While there, he learned the following verses about Paddy Flynn, who had also paid for getting drunk (although Paddy Flynn had paid ninety days).

Portland County Jail

I'm a stranger in your city, my name is Paddy Flynn. I got drunk the other night and the coppers run me in. I had no money to pay my fine, no one to go my bail; So I got stuck for ninety days in the Portland County jail.
Oh, the only friend that I had left
was Happy Sailor Jack;
He told me all the lies he knew,
and all the safes he'd cracked;
He'd cracked them in Seattle,
he'd robbed the Western Mail.
'Twould freeze the blood of an honest man
in the Portland County jail.

Oh, such a bunch of devils no one ever saw,
Robbers, thieves and highwaymen, breakers of the law;
They sang a song the whole night long,
the curses fell like hail;
I'll bless the day that takes me away
from the Portland County jail.

(Sandburg, 1927:215)

As reflected in folk songs, the reasons for being jained have varied over time from murder to minor offenses such as drunkenness. As inmates serve time in jails the folksongs also reveal the conditions of the jails.

"Sam Houston, a white desperado and horse stealer," wrote the following song ". . . while he was in jail in Austin, Texas, in 1880. He was sentenced to twenty-five years in Huntsville" (Lomax and Lomax, 1934:140). One might guess that Houston was looking forward to leaving the Cryderville Jail, even though he was facing a prison term of twenty-five years.
Cryderville Jail

(Chorus:)
Old Dad Morton has got us in jail,
'Tis hard!
Old Dad Morton has got us in jail,
Both father and mother refused his bail,
'Tis hard!
With the doors all locked and barred,
With a big log chain bound down to the floor,
Damn their fool souls, how could they do more?
'Tis hard times in the Cryderville jail,
'Tis hard times, I say [or poor boys].

(Verses:)
There's a big bull ring in the middle of the floor,
And a damned old jailer to open the door.

Your pockets he'll pick, your clothes he will sell,
Your hands he will handcuff, Goddam him to Hell!

It's both of my feet bound in the cell,
My hands tied behind, Goddam him to Hell!

And here's to the cook, I wish he was dead,
It's old boiled beef and old corn bread.

The chuck they give us is beef and corn bread,
As old as Hell and as heavy as lead.

We pop it down in us within our cells,
Just like the pop from Heaven to Hell.

The coffee is rough, and the yard is full of hogs,
And we are guarded by two bulldogs.

No longer than yesterday I heard the jailer say,
He was feeding the prisoners at two dollars a day.

The times was so hard at such poor pay,
He couldn't feed 'em grub but two times a day.

Our bed it is made of old rotten rugs,
When we lay down, we are all covered with bugs;

And the bugs they swear if we don't give bail,
We are bound to get busy in the Tucson jail.
The nits and the lice, climb in the jist,  
One fell down and hollered, "Jesus Christ!"

I said, "Mister Jailer, please lend me your knife,  
For the lice and the bedbugs have threatened my life."

Old Judge Simpkins will read us the law,  
The damndest fool judge you ever saw.

And here's to the lawyer, he'll come to your cell,  
"Give me five dollars and I'll clear you  
in spite of Hell."

But your money they will get before they will rest;  
Then say, "Plead guilty, for I think it is best."

There sits the jury, a devil of a crew,  
They will look the poor prisoner through and through.

Your privileges they will take,  
your clothes they will sell,  
Get drunk on the money, Goddam 'em to Hell.

And here's to the sheriff, I like to forgot,  
He's the biggest old rascal we have in the lot.

And now I have come to the end of my song;  
I'll leave it to the boys as I go along.

As to gamblin' and stealin', I never shall fail,  
And I don't give a damn for lyin' in jail.

They'll send us away for a year or two,  
For makin' a barrel of mountain dew.

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:140-142)

It should be noted that "Cryderville Jail," although classified as a ballad, does not include all the elements of the earlier "criminal goodnights." In this folksong, there is still evidence of the individualistic theme, in that Houston is not saying that he is innocent. He is not
complaining that he was imprisoned unjustly. Nevertheless, he is protesting about the conditions of the jail and the dishonesty and untrustworthiness of criminal justice agents.

This ballad reflects more contemporary prisoners' complaints about jails, prisons, and the authorities of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the convict in this ballad may see himself as part of a subclass of prisoners. However, he is still an individual who broke the law and then became a prisoner, subjected to terrible conditions in the jail. This white inmate still presents himself as an individual separate from other white individuals. His complaints arise from the treatment he receives as a prisoner, not as a member of a socioeconomic class which has been victimized and oppressed by incarceration, a simple continuation to the extreme of this oppression. Neither does Houston offer any reason as to why he broke the law. Society did not make him do it. In fact, he admits that he would probably continue to gamble and steal; it is just that he does not "... give a damn for lyin' in jail."

Political Prisoners' Songs

Although most Anglo-American music exhibits a strong individualistic theme in that the criminal/convict sets
himself apart from others as a deviant, there is one group of songs composed by inmates that does not exhibit such an extreme individualistic theme. Bruce Franklin notes that those individuals imprisoned because of their political activism exhibit a different presentation of their relationship to society. Prisoners incarcerated for political activism wrote autobiographical narratives, "... often involving revelations of life in prison" (Franklin, 1978:131). Furthermore, political reformers who were imprisoned brought their political ideologies with them; the literature and music which they wrote while imprisoned illustrate these particular perspectives. As political reformers, the themes of their songs do not present an individual convict/criminal who has made a mistake and broken the law. Rather, songs written by political prisoners illustrate a critique of not only the conditions of prison and jail in which they find themselves but also the society which placed them there.

One of the earliest documented songs written by a political prisoner is "The Prisoners in Jail," written on July 9, 1845 by Mortimer Belden. During the New York State Anti-Rent Wars of 1839-46, many anti-rentors were jailed.

The Anti-Rent Wars began in the Hudson Valley on January 1, 1838, after the tenant-serfs of the Van
Rensselaer grant objected to paying the annual tithe to the lord of the manor on farms that they could not buy, but that they had worked under perpetual lease for generations" (Philip, 1973:56).

One of the imprisoned leaders of the anti-rentors, Mortimer Belden, though "racked with consumption," improvised songs for his fellow inmates, accompanied by his fiddle. The following text of "The Prisoners in Jail" exhibits protest not only about the conditions in jail but also about the corruption of the criminal justice system in general and the oppression which led to incarceration.

The Prisoners in Jail

There is Boughton, and Belden, and many beside,
They are quite clever fellows,
    or else they are belied,
For what they are in jail, I scarcely do know,
But is is base at the best-- well, let it go so,
    In these hard times.

The sheriffs will out with their array of men,
The County will find them what money they spend;
They will seize upon prisoners, and into the cell--
If there's anything worse, it must be in Hell,
    In these hard times.

And there they will keep them confined in the jail,
Without any liberty for to get bail;
They will do as they please in spite of your friends,
And God only knows where this matter will end,
    In these hard times.

But the sheriff, and others, who go in the huddle,
I'm fearful are getting themselves into trouble,
For unless they keep themselves somewhere near strait,
They will be twich't at the eye at a h-ll of a rate,
    In these hard times.
But we are prisoners in jail-- our cases are hard,
They look all around to keep on their guard,
Their feet fast in irons chained down to the floor,
They are pretty sheriffs what can they do more,
In these hard times.

And as for the jailer he's a man of renown,
He spends all of his time in ironing them down;
He says for their keeping they don't get half pay,
Although he gives them but two poor meals a day,
In these hard times.

The judges and jurors are a very fine crew,
They take the poor prisoners
and drive them right thru;
The sheriffs will falter, all hell they don't fear,
They will bring them in guilty
if they prove themselves clear,
In these hard times.

They will send them to jail, and there for to lie,
On bread and cold water, or else they must die;
Or else down to Sing Sing and there for to dwell.
For twenty-five dollars they would send us to hell,
In these hard times.

The District Attorney is a handsome young man,
He spends all his time in laying some plan,
And as for the sheriff he is a man I despise,
He will go to the governor
with his mouth full of lies,
In these hard times.

He seizes upon property, and that he will sell,
And drink by the way he can do very well;
He will do anything that will profit himself
For Uncle Sam has to pay him as well as the rest,
In these hard times.

And as for their counsel they seem to be clever,
They tell them fine stories--
make all things fair weather;
But it is for money they go as you're all well aware,
And without it they don't care a d--n how we fare
In these hard times.
But there is the doctor I like to forgot
Still he is the meanest of all the whole lot;
He says he will cure them for half they posses,
And when they are dead he will sue for the rest,
In these hard times.

Although he says the old jail is very filthy,
And the jailer must clean it or else he will see,
The prisoners are fast declining,
and the jailer is to blame,
If he don't do his duty he'll report him very soon,
In these hard times.

But I think now it's time to finish my song,
I can prove all I have said
if you think I've done wrong;
For they are prisoners in jail without any bail,
And I think they don't like this lying in jail,
In these hard times.

(Philip, 1973:57-59)

Almost a century later, workers in the coal mines and textile industries were also involved in what might be called political battles in their efforts to organize unions. Many folk songs were written about the trials and tribulations of these workers. And one of the trials which they were likely to endure was imprisonment. Molly Jackson, a prolific folk song composer most noted for her activities in unionizing coal miners, composed and sang in the traditional style of the ballad. Her folk songs deal primarily with the horrible living and working conditions of coal miners and their families in Kentucky in the 1930s. Molly's activities brought her to the attention of local authorities who perceived her as a community trouble
maker. As Molly says, "Lonesome Jailhouse Blues"

... originated from a bunch of 'em a-gettin' mad at me because I took part in a strike, and they framed me and had me put in jail. ... This happened in '31 (Greenway, 1971:265).

Lonesome Jailhouse Blues

Listen, friends and workers,
I have some very sad news;
Your Aunt Molly's locked up in prison
With the lonesome jailhouse blues.

You may find some one will tell you
The jailhouse blues ain't bad;
They're the worst kind of blues
Your Aunt Molly ever had.

I joined the miner's union,
The made them mad at me.
Now I am locked up in prison
Just as lonesome as I can be.

I am locked up in prison
Walking on the concrete floor.
When I leave here this time,
I don't want to be here no more.

Because I joined the union
They framed up a lot of lies on me;
They had me put in prison
I am just as lonesome as I can be.

I am locked up in prison,
Just as lonesome as I can be;
I want you to write me a letter
To the dear old ILD. 2

2 The International Labor Defense was one of the many auxiliary organizations of the Communist Party which aided miners in their labor-organizing activities in the 1930s (Denisoff, 1971:20).
Tell them that I am in prison
Then they will know what to do.
The bosses had me put in jail
For joining the NMU.

This NMU means union
Many thousand strong;
And if you will come and join us
We will teach you right from wrong.

(Greenway, 1971:265-266)

The following song, also by Molly Jackson, about T-Bone Slim, another union activist and friend of hers, tells why T-Bone Slim was locked up for a year and a day.

T-Bone Slim

As I went walking down Peacock Street,
No clothes on my back, no shoes on my feet,
I was hungry and cold, it was late in the fall,
I knocked down some old big shot, took his clothes, money, and all.

(Refrain:)

Oh, tell me how long must I wait for a job?
I don't like to steal, I don't like to have to rob.

When I took everything this old big shot had,
They called me a robber, yes, they called me bad.
They called me a robber, yes, they called me bad,
Because misery and starvation drove me mad.

They locked me up for a year and a day
For taking that old big shot's money away.
Now they turned me out about an hour ago
To walk the streets in the rain and the snow.

---

3 National Miners' Union
No clothes on my back, no shoes on my feet;
Now a man can't live just walkin' the street.
I'd no money for room rent, no place to sleep;
Now a man can't live just walkin' the street.

Now a man can't live with no food to eat,
I'll be sorry to my heart if I have to repeat.
If I knocked down some old big shot,
and took all his kale,
Then they'll put me back in that lousy jail.

T-Bone Slim had tried to get a job for two months.
He had not eaten for two days, and it had been ten weeks
since he had slept in a bed. When he saw this "old big
shot," he just knocked him down, took his suit of clothes,
watch, money, and all.

"T-Bone Slim," "Lonesome Jailhouse Blues," and "The
Prisoners in Jail" all present a picture of both an unjust
society and criminal justice authorities. T-Bone Slim
claims he would not have been forced into robbing the "big
shot" if he had had a job, if he had not been so cold and
hungry. What's more, after spending a year and a day in
jail, the jail officials have now turned him out in the
same condition he was in when he robbed the man a year
ago-- no clothes, no food, and no place to sleep. T-Bone
Slim is not only pointing a finger at the inequitable
society, but he is also saying something about what
prisons do not do for the incarcerated. In their songs,
Molly Jackson and Mortimer Belden also point out the
futility of imprisonment, particularly for those who do not see themselves as criminals but as individuals fighting for a just cause, for their rights--to have a job, to collectively organize, and to buy property.

In sum, the Anglo-American ballads follow a pattern similar to that of Anglo-American literature with respect to changes in structure over time.\(^4\) In the earliest ballads, such as the pre-execution ballads, the author/songwriter/convict tells a story in which he/she is asking forgiveness, not primarily in this world but in the next. The confession of the crime, especially its moral lesson, is ostensibly the purpose of the earliest ballads. Finally, the songwriter/convict sets him/herself off as an example for all other members of society to shun. He or she speaks as a loner: "I'm a deviant, an outlaw, a desperado, a member of an alien underworld, or a convicted murderer" (Franklin, 1982:126).

Later ballads emphasized the exploration of the criminal's life of excitement and adventure, with the confessional and moral overture used simply as a convention but no longer the major purpose of the ballad (Franklin, 1982:126-127).

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\(^4\) The following discussion is based upon H. Bruce Franklin's analysis of American prison literature (1982: 124-178).
Finally, some ballads written by prisoners show evidence of the writer seeing him/herself as a member of a subclass in society, that of prisoner. However, most white songwriters see themselves first as isolated individuals, then as members of the social subclass of prisoner defined by their alienation from the rest of society (Franklin, 1982:142). The white convict rarely portrays him/herself as a member of an oppressed or victimized class in society. Only those inmates who perceive themselves as political prisoners do so. Yet white inmates traditionally have rarely seen themselves as political prisoners.

In conclusion, the majority of early Anglo-American ballads tells a story with a moral and present the author of the ballad as an individual who is separated from the rest of society by deviant behavior and the resulting imprisonment.

COUNTRY MUSIC

Anglo-American ballads in some ways constitute the roots of more contemporary country music. Country music of the early 1900s in the United States is not the country pop or rockabilly which has so recently become part of the commercialized popular contemporary music scene of the
1970s and 1980s, although similarities do exist. However, country music does exhibit similarities to early American ballads and provides a link to country music of the present decade.

Country music is defined primarily in terms of the influence of its origins, its thematic content, and commercialization. In terms of its origins, country music was

.. uncommercialized and pure folk in that its adherents and performers had few monetary outlets open to them and were relatively unaffected by forces outside their native culture. [The music became commercialized] .. when entertainment entrepreneurs [and recording companies] learned in the 1920s that a cash market existed for country music (Malone, 1968:vii).

Recording companies were trying to increase sales in the wake of the emergence and popularity of radio. It was discovered that particular cultural groups were potential sources of increased sales and profits. One of these groups was the poor white rural Southerner who had moved to northern cities for work. The nostalgia of these emigrants for home made them a viable target of recording companies' attention. The emigrant rural Southerners who were earning money in the cities would be most happy to spend some of it on recordings which sounded like music from home. Recording companies sent their agents to the South and to the country to record the country music of
the "folk" right on the spot. The technological changes of the recording industry then led to a structural change in American country songs. A recorded song was limited to one side of a record, which at that time was only three to three and one-half minutes long. Formerly, folk songs such as ballads could be as long as ten minutes when sung live. The story contained in the lyrics now had to be shortened significantly (Malone, 1968:3-32).

By the 1920s, country music had also been influenced by the introduction of harmony singing and musical instruments. These two factors, in addition to commercial recording, de-emphasized the primary goal of the American folk song-- to tell a story. Now instrumental accompaniment and harmony singing led to a balance of attention between the performance and the story, the music and the lyrics (Mullen, 1984).

More relevant to this research, "Country music has always reflected the social . . . milieu in which it was found." It continues to be created " . . . and disseminated throughout this century, largely by rural dwellers within the mainstream of the White Protestant Anglo-Celtic tradition" (Malone, 1968:vii). The most important characteristic of the Anglo-American folk music which country music maintained (and to this day maintains)
is in the thematic content representing the rural/agrarian values of the South.

In addition to religious fundamentalism and ethnic bigotry . . . country music stresses the sadness of life on earth, particularly the pains of unrequited love and the inevitable sorrow brought on by man's sins (Cobb, 1981:82).

Central to the Protestant tradition, an individual stands alone before God. When that individual commits a sin—breaks a law—it is the individual's fault and only he/she is fully accountable. He/she did not listen to mother or to the teachings of the church and got into bad company, often that of a bad woman/man. The individual who gets into trouble with the legal system committed a crime through his/her own choice. The painful and sorrowful conditions of imprisonment are the inevitable consequences brought on by his/her sin. Country music, therefore, continuing in the traditions of the early Anglo-American ballads, presents the criminal/convict as one who blames him/herself for the crime which sent him/her to prison. The criminal of country music continues to set him/herself apart from the group as a bad example, someone not to copy.

Yet country music is different in structure and performance from the early Anglo-American folk music. Socio-cultural and technological changes of the twentieth century have altered it. However, country music still
maintains a continuity with the earlier folk music in its thematic context, reflecting the original rural, conservative values of the United States. Country music still tells a story, most often a sentimental, sad story. One of these sad stories is the criminal/prison story. Prison is not only a common theme in country music but also a common reality in the lives of poor rural whites who have created and disseminated this music throughout the twentieth century. Many more poor than rich white people have always been found in prison in the United States. "To this day 'Doin' My Time' is largely a poor man's worry, and it has found its most eloquent expression in poor man's music . . . country music" (Horstman, 1975:253).

Early 1900s Recordings

One of the earliest and most popular prison song recordings of the country genre is "The Prisoner's Song." Authorship of this song has been vigorously disputed, primarily because of the income it generated. However, there is substantial evidence that this song is really a collection of different folk song verses from various inmates, put together by ". . . Guy Massey (who had actually spent some time in jail . . . )" (Spaeth,
It should be noted that many commercially written and recorded country songs of the first half of this century used phrases and sometimes whole verses from the earlier folk songs. 

"The Prisoner's Song" is just one of the early country songs that shows a linkage to the earlier American folk song in this manner. Variants of it are found in folk song collections such as that of Frank C. Brown (1952). Both the complete fourth verse and the phrase "pillow of stone" are found in other folk songs. (The phrase "pillow of stone" also appears in a commercially recorded song, "Shackles and Chains," which was not written until the 1940s.) Additionally, this song contains one of the common themes found in the pre-execution ballads, the concern about "Leaving my poor darling alone." This song also adds the fantasy escape verse about flying over the prison walls, a theme which can be found in black inmates' songs and more contemporary music of the incarcerated.

The Prisoner's Song

Oh, I wish I had someone to love me
Someone to call me their own
Oh, I wish I had someone to live with
'Cause I'm tired of livin' alone.

Oh, please meet me tonight in the moonlight
Please meet me tonight all alone
For I have a sad story to tell you
It's a story that's never been told.
I'll be carried to the new jail tomorrow
Leaving my poor darling alone
With the cold prison bars all around me
And my head on a pillow of stone.

Now I have a grand ship on the ocean
All mounted with silver and gold
And before my poor darlin' would suffer
Oh, that ship would be anchored and sold.

Now if I had the wings of an angel
Over these prison walls I would fly
And I'd fly to the arms of my poor darlin'
And there I'd be willing to die.

(Horstman, 1975:263-264)

Also from the folk tradition, and similar to the pre-execution ballads, is the following "Still Got Life to Go." This inmate, who is serving a life sentence and has already been imprisoned for eighteen years, reminisces about the crime he committed, worries about his wife and child from whom he has not heard in a "long, long time," and indicates that he would not be in prison if he had not "... used that knife." This song is an example of the early country music which came out of the folk ballad tradition but in the commercial recording process became shortened. Yet most of the elements of the pre-execution ballad are still maintained.

Still Got Life to Go

I've got a sad, sad story friends
That I don't like to tell
I had a wife and family
When they locked me in this cell
I been in here eighteen years
That's a long, long time I know
But time don't mean a thing to me
I've still got life to go

Well I went one night where the lights were bright
To see what I could see
I met up with an old friend
Who thought the world of me

Well he took me out and he bought me drinks
In every honky-tonk in town
Words were said and now he's dead
I just had to bring him down

Well it's been a long, long time now
Since I've heard from my wife
I guess I'd be there with her now
If I had not used that knife

Well I bet that little girl of mine
Don't realize or know
Her daddy's been here eighteen years
And still got life to go

Well I bet there's not a man outside
Who's spent this long in jail
I'll be here in this prison
Till my body's just a shell

No I can't be free to go and see
The ones that I love so
I've been in here eighteen years
And still got life to go
And still got life to go
Still got life to go

(Red Allen)

During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, prison songs became popular among country music enthusiasts. "Shackles and Chains," "Doin' My Time," and "Twenty-One Years" are all songs of that era which are still played by
traditional bluegrass musicians even today. Based on a
story told to him, Jimmie Davis wrote "Shackles and
Chains" (Horstman, 1975:264).

On a long, lonesome journey I'm going
Oh, darling, and please don't you cry
Though in shackles and chains they will take me
In prison to stay till I die
And at night through the bars
I will gaze at the stars
And long for your kisses in vain
A piece of stone I will use as my pillow
While I'm sleeping in shackles and chains.

Put your arms through these bars once, my darling
Let me kiss those sweet lips I love best
In heartache, you're my consolation
In sorrow, my haven of rest
And at night through the bars
I will gaze at the stars
The plans that we made were in vain
A piece of stone I will use as my pillow
While I'm sleeping in shackles and chains.

(Horstman, 1975:264)

Although not written until the 1940s, this song also
illustrates the heritage of the criminal goodnight ballads
in which the prisoner took leave of the world to spend
life in prison. This song includes the "long lonesome
journey" and the loved one he is leaving behind. He
fantasizes about her kisses and describes the conditions
of prison with images of shackles and chains and the
pillow made of stone.

Written in the 1930s, "Twenty-One Years" uses as its
title a line which was frequently found in folk songs.
Note that these lyrics also include elements of criminal goodnights. Although this inmate is not sentenced to life, "... twenty-one years is a mighty long time." The girlfriend is also a concern for this inmate. This woman, similar to women in traditional ballads, put him in the predicament he is in. However, this time he is not guilty. He is covering up for the woman. Therefore, his closing moral is to beware of women who cannot be believed or trusted. Although the convict claims he is not guilty, he does appear to take individual responsibility for being imprisoned. He blames one single woman who he could not trust--not society.

Twenty-One Years

The judge said "Stand up, boy, and dry up your tears, You're sentenced to prison for twenty-one years" So kiss me goodbye, love, and say you'll be mine For twenty-one years, love, is a mighty long time.

O hear that train blow, love, she'll be here on time To take me to prison, to serve out my time So look down that railroad far as you can see And keep right on waving your farewell to me.

The steam from the whistle, the smoke from the stack I know you'll be true, love, until I get back So hold up your head, babe, and dry up your eyes Best friends must part, so won't you and I.

Go beg the governor, babe, on your sweet soul If you can't get a pardon, try and get a parole If I had the governor, well the governor's got me Before sunrise tomorrow, the governor'd be free.
I've counted the days, love, I've counted the nights
I've counted the minutes, I've counted the lights
I've counted the footsteps, I've counted the stars
I've counted a million of these prison bars.

I've counted on you, babe, to give me a break
I guess you forgot, love, I'm here for your sake
You know who's guilty, you know it so well
But I'll rot in prison, before I will tell.

(Horstman, 1975:265)

Finally, "Doin' My Time" was written by Jimmie Skinner as a result of reading Robert Burns' "I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang." Robert Burns was one of the minority of white men who served time on a southern chain gang.

Doin' My Time

On this old rock pile with a ball and chain
They call me by a number, not a name, Lord, Lord
Gotta do my time, gotta do my time
With an aching heart and a worried mind.

When that old judge look down and smile
He said, "I'll put you on that good road
for a while," Lord, Lord
Gotta do my time, gotta do my time
With an aching heart and a worried mind.

You can hear my hammer, you can hear my song
I'm gonna swing it like John Henry all day long,
Lord, Lord
Gotta do my time, gotta do my time
With an aching heart and a worried mind.
It won't be long, just a few more days
Till I'll settle down and quit my rowdy ways,
Lord, Lord
With that gal of mine, with that gal of mine
She'll be waiting for me when I've done my time.

(Horstman, 1975:255)

Again, there is a concern about the woman, "... gal of mine, she'll be waiting for me when I've done my time."

Often inmates are not sure that their women will still be waiting when they have done their time, and phrases like the above often represent wishful thinking and fantasy, rather than the reality that will greet them when they are released. Fantasy, or the belief that everything they want will be waiting for them when they get out, certainly provides a way of adapting to the "pains of imprisonment" and, as noted previously, is just one of the functions of songwriting for the incarcerated inmate. Other researchers also note this phenomenon. Flanagan (1982) reports that "... the prisoner seeks to 'freeze' a picture of life on the outside-- and his or her role in it-- in the mind as an aid to protecting the ego."

In this case, it is the relationship with "that gal of mine" that is frozen so that the inmate has something good to think about and look forward to.

In the early 1960s, Bruce Jackson discovered Hank Ferguson, an inmate at the Michigan City Prison in
Indiana. Similar to many other inmates, past and present, when prison tensions began to work on him, Ferguson channeled them through music. Ferguson's style is that of the earliest country folk songs recorded in the United States. His high-pitched nasal tone and slow tempo make Ferguson's songs sound as forlorn as a funeral dirge (Behind These Walls, 1963). In addition, the themes of his songs also maintain the linkage with some of the earliest songs of the incarcerated.

I'm Not Living

I hear a lonesome whistle blow,
   as I lay in my bed
Sometimes I think that I'd be better off
   if I were dead
I look out through the cold gray bars
   but there's not much to see
When I realize I'm trying hard
   to last until I'm free

I'm not living, I'm just lasting
   while I'm here
And I'm thinking of the freedom
   that once I held so dear
So many years of my life
   will be wasted for a crime
I'm not living, I'm just tryin'
   to last longer than my time

5 The graduate student who helped transcribe these songs told the researcher he hated them. When asked why, the graduate student replied that the songs clearly brought back the feelings he had experienced when he had been incarcerated in the local detention center for failure to pay child support.
My sweetheart told me she would wait
for me until I'm free
I wonder if she understood
how long that wait could be
There's fifty years in front of me
too long to stay alive
But maybe if I'm good
they'll let me out in forty-five.

(Behind These Walls, 1963)

"I'm Not Living" echoes the sentiments of "Still Got Life to Go," "Doin' My Time," and many others. Ferguson worries about his sweetheart who told him she would wait. He knows what will probably happen. Eventually, he will not hear from her, anymore than the inmate who has "Still Got Life to Go." Both inmates are thinking of freedom:

And I'm thinking of the freedom
that once I held so dear

................

No I can't be free . . .

The inmate of "Still Got Life to Go," in describing the crime he committed, does not seem to blame anyone but himself, and Ferguson only mourns the wasted years of his life behind bars.

In another of Ferguson's songs, "One Life's as Long as Any Man Can Live," the following verses reflect the inmate's friends and hometown which he misses-- so much so that he does not have "the heart to live." (Recall Maxie, the black inmate of Angola in the 1960s who also was
The following song, "The Walls," also reflects not only actual suicide but also the fantasy of all inmates—to be free. This inmate was driven to it because of a "Dear John" letter which often drives inmates to suicide (Cardoza-Freeman, 1984:353).

The Walls

There's a lot of strange men
in cell block ten
The strangest of them all
was a friend of mine
Who spent his time
staring at the wall,
Staring at the wall.
And in his hand was a note
his girl had wrote,
Proof that crime don't pay
but the very same girl
He'd robbed and stole for
named her wedding day
She named her wedding day.

And when he looked at that wall
so strong and tall
I heard him softly curse
No man at all
Ever climbed that wall
but watch me be the first
Watch me be the first.

The warden walked by,
said Son don't try
I'd hate to see you fall
but there's no doubt
They'll carry you out
if you ever touch that wall
Don't ever touch the wall.

Now years went by
since he made his try
And I can still recall,
how hard he tried
The way he died
but never made the wall
He never climbed that wall.

There's never been a man
to shake this camp
But I knew of one who tried
The newspaper called it
A jailbreak plan
But I called it suicide
I called it suicide.

(Behind These Walls, 1963)

More contemporary popular country songs also include prison themes and maintain a linkage with the major themes of the pre-execution ballad and criminal goodnights. In
fact, according to various newspaper articles of the late 1970s, many top country singers/songwriters are ex-convicts (Monroe News-Star, 1976; Phoenix Gazette, 1976; The Evening Bulletin, 1976; and the Chicago Daily News, 1976). "Prison Proves Fruitful for Country Singers," reports The Evening Bulletin of Philadelphia (1976). "Their Talents Had to be Unlocked," reveals the New York Post (1976). Such notables as Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Paycheck, Merle Haggard, Johnny Rodriguez, Freddie Fender, David Allan Coe, and Glen Sherley have a reputation connected with prison. To set the record straight, however, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, and Johnny Rodriguez never served prison sentences. Johnny Rodriguez spent some time in jail for goat rustling as a teenager. Waylon Jennings was arrested in 1977 for possession of cocaine but was never indicted (Nashville Banner, 1982:1). And although noted for many popular country songs such as "Folsom Prison Blues" and "San Quentin," Johnny Cash was never incarcerated in a prison either (Horstman, 1972; Gibbs, 1984; Wren, 1971). However, during the 1960s he was arrested seven different times and spent seven "one-night stands" in jail. As a result of one of these "overnighters," he wrote "Starkville City Jail" . . . on behalf of all you guys here at San Quentin to kind of get back of whoever you
want to out there. In my case, I'd like to get back at the fellow down in Starkville, Mississippi that still has my $36" (Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison and San Quentin).

Starkville City Jail

Well I left my motel room
don down at the Starkville Motel
The town had gone to sleeping,
I was feeling pretty well
I strolled along the sidewalk
'neath the sweet magnolia trees
I was whistling, picking flowers,
swaying in the southern breeze
I found myself surrounded,
one policeman said That's him
Come along wild flower child
don't you know that it's 2:00 a.m.

They're bound to get you 'cause they've got a curfew
And you go to the Starkville City Jail

Well they threw me in the car
and started driving into town
I said What the hell did I do
and he said Shut up and sit down
Well they emptied out my pockets
took my pills and my guitar picks
I said Wait my name is-- Oh shut up
Well I sure was in a fix
The sergeant put me in a cell
then he went home for the night
I said Come back here you so and so
I ain't being treated right

Well, they're bound to get you
'cause they've got a curfew
And you go to the Starkville City Jail

I started pacing back and forth
and now and then I'd yell
And kick my forty dollar shoes
against the steel door of my cell
I'd walk a while and kick a while
and all night nobody came
Then I sadly remembered
they didn't even take my name
At 8 a.m. they let me out
I said Give them things of mine
They gave me a sneer and a guitar pick
and a yeller dandelion
They're bound to get you 'cause they've got a curfew
And you go to the Starkville City Jail
And you go to the Starkville City Jail

(Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison
and San Quentin)

"Starkville City Jail" is the only song Cash wrote as a direct result of his personal jail experience. This song conveys a frustration with the injustice of paying $36 and a night in jail for picking flowers. (One wonders, however, if that is all Cash was doing.) The lyrics of this song are not consistent with the self-blame moral of much of the earlier Anglo-American music of this research. It should be noted, however, that Cash wrote this song on the eve of a prison concert. "I've been here [San Quentin] three times, and I feel I know how you feel about some things" (Wren, 1971:200). It is obvious that Cash composed this song in order to empathize with the inmates. In fact, much of the confusion concerning the questions of Cash's imprisonment comes from Cash's efforts to identify with inmates ... because his sense of life itself as a sort of jailhouse had given him an empathy
with men trapped behind bars" (Wren, 1970:197). The inmates at the prisons he performed in conveyed their acceptance of his perceptions by their resounding applause and cheers for such songs as "San Quentin" and "Folsom Prison Blues." At San Quentin "The inmates stood on benches and tables and yelled him on" (Wren, 1971:200) when he sang "San Quentin." As an introduction to the song, he told the inmates that he "... tried to put myself in your place and I believe this is the way I'd feel about San Quentin." The inmates' response confirmed that he was successful in putting himself in their place and certainly justifies the inclusion of "San Quentin" in this research.

San Quentin

San Quentin you've been a living hell to me
You galled at me since 1963
I've seen them come and go and I've seen them die
And long ago I stopped asking why

San Quentin I hate every inch of you
You cut me and you scarred me through and through
And I'll walk out a wiser, weaker man
Mr. Congressman, why can't you understand?

San Quentin what good do you think you do?
Do you think that I'll be different
when you're through?
You bend my heart and mind and you warp my soul
Your stone walls turn my blood a little cold
San Quentin may you rot and burn in hell

(Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison and San Quentin)
"Folsom Prison Blues" had also elicited the same type of response from the inmates at Folsom. The inmates along with Cash confirm that prison is a "living hell." At the Folsom concert in the late 1960s, ".. Johnny Cash walked on stage and said, 'Glen Sherley, here is your song' and sang 'Greystone Chapel'" (Sherley, 1971). The lyrics of "Greystone Chapel" illustrate a linkage to previous folk ballads of inmates. The earlier folk ballads often included a wish for God's forgiveness for their crimes. Here, too, "Greystone Chapel" illustrates one of the prisoners' "Great Escapes," ".. the turn to religion as a psychological survival tactic" (Cardoza-Freeman, 1984:433). In order to adapt to prison, it is not unusual for many prisoners to become religious behind bars. Indeed, as Durkheim states, one of the most important functions of religion is to explain that which cannot be explained. Belief in God and the assurance of a better life after this one is certainly a functional adaptation to the "pains of imprisonment."

Greystone Chapel

There's a Greystone Chapel here at Folsom
It's a house of worship in this den of sin
You wouldn't think God had a place here at Folsom
But he's saved the soul of many lost men
Now this Greystone Chapel here at Folsom
Stands a hundred years old made of granite rock
Takes a ring of keys to move here at Folsom,
But the door to the house of God is never locked

Inside the walls of prison my body may be,
But my Lord has set my soul free.

There's men here that don't ever worship
And there's men here who scoff at the ones who pray.
But I've got down on my knees
in that Greystone Chapel
And I've thanked the Lord for helping me each day

Now this Greystone Chapel here at Folsom
Has the touch of God's hand on every stone
It's a flower of light in a field of darkness
And it's given me the strength to carry on

Inside the walls of prison my body may be,
But my Lord has set my soul free
But my Lord has set my soul free

(Glen Sherley, 1971)

As a result of Cash's recognition, Glen Sherley, a
graduate of Chino, Solidad, San Quentin, and Folsom (all
California prisons), went on to record his own album live
to two consecutive seatings of a full house at Vacaville,
California (another California prison) on January 31,
1971. Sherley had insisted that he would not draw a very
big crowd (inmates did not have to attend the shows if
they did not want to). But the inmates not only showed up
(1600 strong in total), they would not leave until the
whole show had been fully repeated for them. Sherley's
songs not only speak clearly to the inmates, but they also
provide a linkage in thematic content to the earliest pre-
execution and criminal goodnight ballads (Glen Sherley, 1971).

"Greystone Chapel" provides the religious element. Sherley also sings the following song about "his woman"—again, an example of wishful thinking— an idealized concept of the woman who helps the inmate to make it through long days and nights in the company of only men.

Portrait of My Woman

Eyes that shine with love for me
Caring not for fame's prestige
Asking not what I can't give
That's a portrait of my woman

Gentle hands caress my cheek
Understanding when I'm weak
Courage when the need is there
That's a portrait of my woman

Faith in me that gives me strength
Pouring love for me to drink
Sharing life with a smile
That's a portrait of my woman

I've stumbled with our dreams and fell
And every precious dream we had just shattered
She kissed my lips and said my love
Was all that really mattered

So I'll try every day
To hand her love's happy bouquet
She means more than life to me
That's a portrait of my woman

(Glen Sherley, 1971)

"The F.B.I. Top Ten" chronicles the escape to freedom and the continuous running of a "desperate criminal."
I'm hunted like a mad dog
But this freedom beats the pen

There is also the sense of excitement and bravado about being ". . . number on the FBI's top ten," reminiscent of descriptions of the criminal's life which appeared in much earlier folk ballads and convict literature of the early part of the century (Franklin, 1982:126-127). Sherley also pays tribute to his mother with "Mama Had Country Soul." Sherley reflects:

I look back on all those years
I've loved and it's plain as day
That I've had more than most folks have
To help me along the way
And what I've had is something
I never could have bought or sold
It was planted there with Mama's loving care
Don't you know it's country soul

Cause Mama said, "Children as you travel through life
There's some light on the darkest road.
If you keep you a double handful of hope
And a heartful of country soul
You're gonna make it children
With a heartful of country soul."

(Glen Sherley, 1971)

It certainly was not Mama's fault that the inmate spent many years of his life locked up, and he lets everyone know what a wonderful woman his mother is. She was not to
blame for his mistakes. Furthermore, Sherley exhorts his fellow inmates not to make the same mistakes he did. "Looking Back in Anger" does no good. "For God's sakes, for God's sakes man, don't let it take you no ten-and-a-half years in here to get yourself together" (Sherley, 1971).

Looking Back in Anger

A cold bitter mist covers your eyes
A Coleman is raging in you
So all you can see is just the ugly side
Looking back in anger like you do.

You've been a witness to the pornographic past
The smutty face of evil showing through
But you can't change the smallest part
of all that evil done
Looking back in anger like you do.

Now I ain't preaching, I'm just talking
But I believe in what I say
That look of anger you keep flashing
Won't accomplish you anything today.

Reach out your hand-- someone will take it
Someone took mine, then I saw a different view
I saw it'll take, take a lot more doing
And a lot less looking back in anger like you do.

The wrongs you have seen clutter up your mind
Fear's forever gnawing on you
And in that pool of pride where you wade
there's little hope
Looking back in anger like you do.

(Glen Sherley, 1971)

Finally, Sherley's songs go beyond the early pre-execution ballads and graphically describe the conditions of
contemporary prisons with:

If This Prison Yard Could Talk

(Chorus:)
If this prison yard could talk
What a story could be told
Of the things it's seen
That would make a strong man's blood grow cold

Now it's seen some with too much time to do
Just give up all hope and take their own life
And it's felt hot blood coughed up on it by a man
Struck down by another man, with a homemade knife

It's felt tears of rage and hate
As caged men curse it and walk
It would be a story to chill the soul
If this prison yard could talk

Not it's seen men with hearts like a lion
Turn into a wretch, young but old in the face
And it's heard the madness and the laughter of men
Reaching out for insanity's welcome warm embrace

It's had men to walk it and weep
Till their hair turned white as chalk
It'd be a tail of men living in hell
If this prison yard could talk

(Glen Sherley, 1971)

David Allan Coe, perhaps one of the more infamous and colorful ex-convicts who have made it in the commercial country music business, also recorded an album of songs written while he was incarcerated: Penitentiary Blues.6

6 Transcriptions of Coe's songs are from the 8-track tape of Penitentiary Blues, copyright 1978, not the original record album of 1968.
According to his own accounts, by the age of 24 Coe had already spent half of his life in institutions (Coe, 1978:30). The first commitment as a young boy was to the Starr Commonwealth for Boys in Albion, Michigan (Coe, 1978:3). His father turned him over to juvenile authorities because he had stolen pop bottles and in general did all the things a juvenile delinquent does. In Coe's words:

I got out of hand, running away from home, stealing Dad's cigarettes, and smoking in the basement. Generally doing all the things that prove to adults they have a juvenile delinquent on their hands. My father must have known it would be useless to correct me for my wrongdoings and besides they had places for kids like me. Didn't they? (Coe, 1978:3)

The commitment to this first of many boys' homes was just the beginning. Coe was in and out of both juvenile centers and adult prisons until 1967 at the age of 28, when he was released from the Marion Correctional Institution in Ohio. Coe's notoriety as an ex-convict comes from conflicting reports about the murder of an inmate in the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio and reports that he was locked up an death row for the murder (Nashville Banner, 1982:1). However, a reading of Coe's own book, Just for the Record (1978:42,48), reveals two separate incidents of inmates' murders. In one incident, Coe (1978:43) did not actually kill the man. He only threw "a ball peen hammer" to a friend who was in a
fight with a black inmate. With regard to this incident, prison authorities put Coe in isolation, and the only isolation cells available were on death row. When the inmate murderer was found, Coe was released from isolation on death row. The other incident involves Coe killing another inmate for making homosexual advances toward him. However, according to his book, Coe was not charged and in fact, not long after the incident, was transferred to Marion Corretional Institution in Marion, Ohio, which at that time was an honor camp, according to Coe (Coe, 1978:48). (Marion is not an honor camp as of 1987.)

However, a clarification of the rumors concerning Daid Allan Coe's prison experiences is not the major thrust of this work. What does appear to be true is that Coe spent many years in both juvenile and adult institutions, and he has written many songs as a result of his incarceration experiences.

Many of Coe's songs also echo the themes of earlier ballads and Glen Sherley's work, but with a more contemporary flavor. "Penitentiary Blues" recalls some of the activities that led to Coe's "Penitentiary Blues." (Coe's criminal reputation does not include drugs, yet drug use may have been part of that "life." Or he could be recounting the typical inmates' paths to prison.) Note
the use of drugs and the "cats down on the corner" with whom he used to play pool. This inmate also misses his "Main Street women."

Penitentiary Blues

Got there on Monday,
beind this wall and all them doors
They got me doing work, woman,
and I never worked before
About to blow my fuse
Penitentiary Blues

They give me clothes on Tuesday,
like I ain't never seen before
The kind of rags my momma used
to scrub our kitchen floor
The funny-squared toed shoes,
Mmm-- Penitentiary Blues

All that funny marijuana, selling cocaine
Now they're taking blood tests from my heroin veins
Oh baby, things I used to do now
I was born to lose
Penitentiary Blues

I miss my Main Street women
I miss my Aaron Street wine
I miss the cats down on the corner
We used to have a swinging time, child
Chalking up our cues
Mmm-- Penitentiary Blues

All that marijuana, selling cocaine
Now they're taking blood tests from my heroin veins
Oh baby, things I used to do
I was born to lose
Penitentiary Blues

(Penitentiary Blues, 1978)

The following song, "Cell 33," describes the inmate's reaction to a "Dear John" letter. Not only does he need a
doctor, but he also suggests the possibility of suicide with the line, "They'll find me hanging here tomorrow, if they don't come with a key" (Penitentiary Blues, 1978). This inmate's threat of suicide is not an unlikely one. Wolfram Rieger, a former prison psychiatrist at the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, found that in a study of 58 suicide attempts by prisoners, "... those that were most serious were precipitated by the recent loss of a loved one" (Cardoza-Freeman, 1984: 353).

Cell 33

Someone call a doctor
tell him that I'm sick
Say my woman left me
and he'd better come real quick
I've got a broken heart for certain
the symptoms I can see
Someone call a doctor
tell him cell thirty-three

Well I've been in this prison
five long years it seems
Today I got a "Dear John" letter
that shattered all my dreams
I got a broken heart
the symptoms I can see
Someone call a doctor
tell him cell thirty-three

I've been sawing on these bars
so long I wanna shout
I'm getting out of this place soon,
of that there is no doubt
"They'll find me hanging here tomorrow,
if they don't come with a key
Someone call a doctor
tell him cell thirty-three
(Spoken and faded out:)
I ain't fooling now
You all call the doctor
I'm sick-- I need help

(Penitentiary Blues, 1978)

In the song "One Way Ticket," Coe goes beyond the traditional folk songs, not with excitement or the fantasy of escape, but with the fear of facing the "free world" after ten long years. This inmate has been locked up so long that no one is left who cares about him. He has no one and no place to go.

One Way Ticket

Ten long years in prison
  there's no one left to care
Ten long years in prison
  there's no one left to care
Ride that train out in the morning,
  got a one-way ticket to nowhere.

..............................................................

A suit of clothes they'll give me
  and money for my fare
A suit of clothes they'll give me
  and money for my fare
Gonna leave my past behind me,
  got a one-way ticket to nowhere.

..............................................................

(Penitentiary Blues, 1978)

"Like David Allan Coe, Merle Haggard was also a "state raised youth." From the age of 16 until his release from
San Quentin at the age of 23, Haggard was constantly in and out of reform school and prison. His first two number-one hits, "Branded Man" and "I'm a Lonesome Fugitive," were written as a result of his criminal life and prison experiences at San Quentin.

Merle Haggard's songs also illustrate an almost direct connection to the thematic content of the earliest criminal goodnights although this linkage is not made in just one of his songs; it takes an examination of a few of them.

The following song, "I'm a Lonesome Fugitive," not only presents the isolation of the "wanted" man on the run; he is also lonely because he cannot take the one he loves with him.

I'm a Lonesome Fugitive

Down every road there's always one more city,
I'm on the run, the highway is my home.
I raised a lot of "cane" back in my younger days,
While Mama used to pray my crops would fail.
Now I'm a hunted fugitive with just two ways:
Outrun the law or spend my life in jail.

(Chorus:)
I'd like to settle down, but they won't let me;
A fugitive must be a rolling stone.
Down every road there's always one more city;
I'm on the run, the highway is my home.
I'm lonely, but I can't afford the luxury
Of having one I love to come along;
She'd only slow me down, and they'd catch up with me;
For he who travels fastest goes alone.

(The History of Country Music
Presents Merle Haggard, 1981)

In "Branded Man," Haggard goes beyond earlier folk songs and protests about having the "black mark" of ex-convict which "... follows him ... no matter where [he's] living." In "Mama Tried," he takes the position of the earliest convict of folk ballads and blames himself. Unlike black inmates who see class and race discrimination as a factor in the cause of their criminal life and incarceration, Haggard sets himself as an example not to copy. Merle Haggard's songs and the songs of the other famous country singers such as Sherley and Coe, along with the less notable Ferguson, taken together substantiate the continuous themes of Anglo-American inmates' songs over time. The criminal worries about the shame that his family must bear for his or her wrongdoings. The men worry especially about the women from whom they are separated. Finally, as stated by Merle Haggard in the following lyrics of "Mama Tried," the inmate blames him/herself. It was certainly not mother's fault, because she tried.
Mama Tried

First thing I remember knowin'
was a lonesome whistle blowin'
And a youngun's dream of growin' up to ride,
on a freight train leavin' town
not knowin' where I'm bound,
And no one could change my mind,
but Mama tried.

One and only rebel child,
from a family meek and mild,
my Mama seemed to know what lay in store,
'Spite of all my Sunday learnin'
towards the bad I kept on turnin'
'Til Mama couldn't hold me anymore.

Dear old Daddy, rest his soul,
left my Mom a heavy load,
She tried so very hard to fill his shoes,
Workin' hours without rest,
Wanted me to have the best,
She tried to raise me right
but I refused.

(Chorus:)
I turned twenty-one in prison
doing life without parole
No one could steer me right
but Mama tried
Mama tried to raise me better
but her teaching I denied
That leaves only me to blame
'cause Mama tried

(Haggard, 1981:9,41,54;
and Franklin, 1981:271)
CHAPTER VI

THE EXPERIENCE OF INCARCERATION FOR
THE BLACK INMATE

INTRODUCTION

Before the Emancipation Proclamation, imprisonment in the United States was reserved mostly for the white male. However, from 1865 up to the present, southern prisons have been primarily populated by black men. Moreover, since that time, most prisons in the United States have been populated by blacks out of proportion to their representation in the United States population as a whole. Since 1865, being black in the United States increased the risk of incarceration. Yet as already noted in Chapter III, not until Leo Carroll's *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons* (1974) did black ethnicity become an important marker in sociological inquiry into the prisons. This chapter attempts to rectify that omission and uses folk songs from the collection of Gellert (1936); Harrah-Conforth (1984); Lomax and Lomax (1934, 1936, 1939, and 1941); Oster (1969); Seeger (1951); and Jackson (1972) in order to
understand the experience of incarceration for the black inmate up to the 1970s. These songs also illustrate the existence of a separate black inmate subculture before the 1960s. Finally, consistent with the major thesis of this research, much of the black inmates' music also reflects the "pains of imprisonment," the deprivations, the losses, the negatives of prison life. Also, black inmates, much more than white inmates, sing about the injustices and inequities of the criminal justice system in particular, and society in general, which landed them in jail, in prison, on the chain gangs, and in the work camps.

At a more abstract level, many of the songs by black inmates are songs of protest. Consistent with discoveries and reinterpretations of data in other disciplines, blacks in general, and black inmates in particular, did not wait until the 1960s to protest. From the very beginning of slavery blacks have protested against the conditions they have found themselves in (Berry and Blasingame, 1982; Franklin, 1982; and Levine, 1977). It is not surprising then that protest is found in the song lyrics of black inmates. It would be more surprising if it were not found. After all, blacks have always been allowed to sing that which is not allowed in ordinary conversation. Also, the conditions of incarceration, particularly in the South, have been ripe for expressions of protest. And
finally, the Thirteenth Amendment supposedly freed the slaves, but conviction of a felony and incarceration extended legal slave status for all felons long after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. (United States Constitution, Amendment XIII, emphasis added)

Guided by themes of protest, the following exposition of music will trace the incarceration experience and conditions for the black inmate from the Emancipation to the 1960s. Although folklorists did not actually go to the prisons to collect music until the 1920s, some of these data reveal what the previous experiences and perceptions had been for black inmates. How can this be so? In many ways the experience of the incarcerated black, particularly in the South, did not change much until the 1970s. Whether it was 1890 in the prison camps and chain gangs of Florida; Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana, or Cummins Farm in Arkansas of the 1960s, the conditions of incarceration did not change for the black inmate in America. Whether the songs are field hollers, work songs, the blues or religious songs such as gospels and spirituals, the following discussion will concentrate
on the themes of protest which the music clearly illustrates.

This chapter then includes the various types, themes, and functions of black inmates' folk songs. Since the black man's roots and experiences in the United States are different from the white man's, there are differences also in the product of their culture, in their folk songs. Black inmates rarely sing ballads; rather, they sing work songs, blues, gospels, and spirituals. Yet before the songs themselves are discussed, it is important to first understand the source, meaning, and function of the work songs and blues for the black inmates.

WORK SONGS

Imprisonment for the black man, particularly in the South after 1865 and well into the 1960s, has not meant only being locked up in a cell. A sentence to prison for blacks in earlier years has generally meant hard work on a convict chain gang which could mean any kind of work, from building roads, to working on the levees and working in the turpentine camps of Florida, to building railroads, logging, mining, and farm work on the plantation prisons of Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi after the turn of the century. However, working in a group was not a strange
phenomenon for blacks since much of the work was the same 
work that they had done as slaves before Emancipation, as 
laborers and sharecroppers. And they brought to the work 
gangs the tradition of the work song. Work songs have 
many functions for the black inmates, but primarily they 
establish a rhythm or pace for work. "It is not a song 
that happened to be sung while someone was working" 
(Jackson, 1972:28). Supplying a pace for work is equated 
with survival when one is doing dangerous work such as 
cutting down trees with a team of other workers. It can 
also make the work more efficient and generally is an 
aesthetically pleasing way of working. Historically, work 
songs served another survival function:

[...] [M]en who worked too slowly were singled out and 
not infrequently summarily punished by strokes of the 
bat. By singing together and keeping the strikes 
together while cutting logs or working with hoes, no 
one could be singled out for being too slow, so no 
one could be punished simply because he was weaker 
than his fellow workers (Jackson, 1972:30).

Also, work songs are used to make the time go by when 
engaging in extremely boring prison work. Finally, work 
songs (but not only work songs):

[...] offer a partial outlet for the inmates' 
tensions, frustrations and angers. There is a long 
tradition in the South of the black man being 
permitted to sing things that he is not permitted to 
say. [...] It is as if the song words are not real 
(Jackson, 1972:30).
Furthermore, Jackson (1972:30) suggests one more function of prison work songs:

The songs change the nature of the work by putting the work into the worker's framework rather than the guards'. By incorporating the work with their song, by in effect, co-opting something they are forced to do anyway, they make it theirs in a way it otherwise is not.

Work songs provide various functions for the inmates. In essence, "Work songs are songs that help a person do work" (Jackson, 1972:31).

Work songs, as a type of black music, are considered a separate category not only because they do not require an audience (Jackson, 1972), but because they also exhibit a peculiar type of rhythm and beat that is foreign to most American ears. Simply stated, work songs have a basic Afro-American rhythm. What is most significant about work songs is that they are not simply the oldest, but probably the most basic form of prison music.

In 1987 work songs have essentially disappeared in the black inmate community, but not for the predicted reasons. Jackson (1972) believed that they were dying out because of the increased use of technology (i.e., mechanization) which replaced the brute captive labor of the inmates. But not all plantation prisons have adopted modern agricultural technology. In fact, according to a 1986 Mississippi Department of Corrections newsletter,
inmates are still used to pick cotton by hand. (This type of labor is purported to develop a sense of the Protestant work ethic in the inmate.) It is more likely that inmates do not use the work songs anymore because they are not needed. Recent rulings by the Supreme Court have prohibited cruel and inhumane treatment of prisoners such as whipping to death for failure to work, or sun-up to sun-down work days with little or no water or food. Finally, consistent with Jackson's research (1972), young inmates no longer want to sing what seems to them "oldtimeyniggerstuff" (Jackson, 1972:xxi).

BLUES

The largest and most prominent category of music in the black cultural tradition is the blues. In order to understand the importance of the use of blues by black inmates, this section includes not only an attempt to define the blues, but also a short discussion of the social and historical conditions that produced this music. "... [A]ttempts to define the blues even by the well-informed have often been as confusing as they were intended to be clarifying" (Garon, 1975:29). Robert Palmer (1981:43) suggests that the blues cannot be defined in a very specific way. "... [W]e have to be content to
talk about a tendency toward twelve-bar, AAA or AAB verse forms, or a tendency toward pentatonic melodies with a flattened third." Definitions of the blues then center around the structure or form of the verse, the unique sound and structure of the tune and the themes of the lyrics. Most certainly, it is the peculiar sound which makes a song a "blues" song. The word "blues" in the title does not make the song a blues. "It is the tone of the blues, the way they are played and sung (rather than the words themselves) that establishes the songs' definite credentials most clearly" (Garon, 1975:35). Without going into a technical discussion of the structure of the tune, it should be noted "... that the word 'cry' is one of the most common terms used to describe the manner in which the blues are sung" (Garon, 1975:36). It is a quality of sadness and loneliness which seems to be irrevocably bound to the blues. Keeping in mind the historical discussion of imprisonment in the United States, particularly the treatment of black inmates in the South, it is no wonder that the blues were easily adaptable to the prison experience. Moreover, H. Bruce Franklin (1982:107) notes that "... [T]he blues form ... developed with the prison experience at its core..." Franklin's observation about the blues is consistent with Chartres' (1963:11-12) claim that the blues developed around the
turn of the century in reaction to the reality of the lack of freedom after Emancipation. Emancipation simply did not bring the changes in conditions that blacks had expected. To Chartres, the blues were born out of disappointment. And one of the major disappointments was most certainly the prison experience which continued to enslave blacks.

Whether the prison experience was at the core of the development of the blues or not is not the most important issue here. What is important is that the blues developed out of the unique social experience of the blacks in America, and the blues form has been found in prisons among the black inmates well into the 1970s and 1980s.

Two more points need to be made about the blues. As a musical form the blues has most often been described as "... a self centered music, highly personalized, wherein the effects of everyday life are recounted in terms of the singers' reactions" (Garon, 1975:33). Moreover, Levine (1977:223) points out that "... blues singing signalled the rise of a more personalized individual-oriented ethos among Negroes at the turn of the century." Yet the individual creator of the blues does not set him/herself off from the audience who listens to these blues. In fact, just the opposite is the case.
The unique personal level of this presentation . . . intensifies the appeal of the blues to its audience as a whole; far from weakening the bonds between the singer and his audience, the highly personalized nature of the blues seems only to strengthen them (Garon, 1975:33).

The blues, even though an individual creation, is at the same time expressing emotions that, in fact, are shared by members of the black community. And these expressions that arise out of the black experience in the United States make this musical form a collective expression.

Did blues singing . . . testify to the decline of that sense of communality which was so characteristic of both the structure and content of nineteenth-century songs . . . [of blacks in America? Levine (1977:223-224) claims that] [T]he personalized, solo elements of the blues style may indicate a decisive move into twentieth-century American consciousness . . .

However,

. . . blues with its emphasis on improvisations; its retention of the call and response pattern; its polyrhythmic effects and its method of vocal production which included slides, slurs, vocal leaps, and the use of falsetto, was a definite assertion of central elements of the traditional communal musical style [of West Africa] (Levine, 1977:223-224).

THE MUSIC

Historically, one of the primary objectives of most prisons and particularly those in the South was an economic one. Not only were southern prison systems supposed to financially sustain themselves, but through
the use of the lease systems they were also expected to
make a profit. "Indeed, many colored believe that
employers of convicts urge Southern police to greater
activities among Negroes in order to fill up the convict
camps, and that the proneness of juries to convict is
directly in proportion to the needs of the county for
labor" (Van Deusen, 1938:130).

One of the oldest blues, "Joe Turner," is about one
of the men who came to town to round up more "labor for
the county."

They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone.
They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone. (Oh, Lordy)
Got my man and gone.

He come with forty links of chain.
He come with forty links of chain. (Oh, Lordy)
Got my man and gone.

They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone.
They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone. (Oh, Lordy)
Done left me here to sing this song.

Come like he never come before.
Come like he never come before. (Oh, Lordy)
Got my man and gone.

(J. Silverman, 1968:29-30)

1 There is another interpretation about "Joe Turner"
which makes him a hero in black folk tradition. (See
complete discussion of this tradition.) However, Handy,
1925:41 and 79-82, and Odum and Johnson, 1925:206, both
have some of the texts in the same tradition used in this
study.
The notorious Joe Turney\(^2\) was the brother of Pete Turney, governor of Tennessee from 1892-1896 (Silverman, 1968:29). It was Joe Turney's job to transport convicts from Memphis to the Nashville Penitentiary and to the convict farms along the Mississippi.

His real purpose was not to punish criminals for the sake of law and order but to round up cheap labor workers who would only have to be fed and housed. The system was to get a stool pigeon to start a crap game. When enough Negroes were rolling the dice, the law would suddenly swoop down-- arrest the number needed to work, rush them through a token trial kangaroo court and hand them over to Joe Turney. Turney would handcuff eighty prisoners to forty links of chain and lead them off (Oster, 1969:16).

Joe Turney was a feared and infamous man among black inmates. The black convicts of Angola, Louisiana were still singing about Joe Turner in the late 1950s (Oster, 1969:306).

Bud Russel, another man who transported prisoners from the county jails of Texas to the state penitentiary, is also mentioned in the lyrics of black inmates' songs.

"Yonder comes Bud Russel."
"How in de worl' do you know?"
"Tell him by his big hat
An' his 44.

\(^2\) Change in spelling which often happens in folk tradition. "Turney" is the correct spelling. Through the process of transmission the name became "Turner."
He walked into de jail-house
Wid a gang o' chains in his han's;
I heard him tell de captain,
'I'm de transfer man.'"

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:73)

Thirty years later, Texas inmates still sing about Bud Russel.

"Here come Bud Russel."
"How in de worl' do you know?"
Well he know him by his wagon
and chains he wo'.

Big pistol on his shoulder,
big knife in his hand;
He's comin' to carry you
back to Sugarland.

(Jackson, 1972:93)

Bud Russel joined the Texas system in 1908 as assistant transfer agent. "In 1912, he became transfer agent himself and held the job for forty years. He handled 115,000 prisoners" (Jackson, 1972:314). One of the Texas inmates interviewed by Bruce Jackson in the late 1960s describes what it was like to be picked up by Bud Russel in 1938:

Put a chain on your neck and a lock—little Yale lock. Turn your collar up and say, "All right boys, get ready to put on this necktie." A Yale lock and a chain and you had a throw chain he'd run through the

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3 Sugarland is the name of one of the prison camps in Texas.
whole line. If one guy run, he got to carry the whole bunch with him. You can't do it, he had you (Jackson, 1972:314).

Not only were Joe Turney and Bud Russel feared, but Governor Joe Brown was being accused of being a "mean white man" by chain gang convicts in Atlanta, Georgia in the 1920s. Joseph Emerson Brown, the governor of Georgia during the Civil War, owned a coal mine for which he leased black convict labor from the state. The following lyrics clearly express the "... bad conditions in which Brown forced the Black inmates to exist" (Cap'n, You're So Mean, liner notes).

Joe Brown, Joe Brown
he's a mean white man
he's a mean white man
I know, honey he put
them shackles around
around my leg
And he made my leg hurt so.

In the verses about Joe Turney and Bud Russel, there is the suggestion that they were to be feared. In "Joe Brown," the lyrics clearly state the he is a "mean white man." In this case the inmates can sing that which is not allowed in ordinary conversation. They are clearly protesting about the conditions in which this "mean white man" forces them to exist.

Lleadbelly, who spent more than a dozen years in Texas and
Louisiana prisons from 1900 to 1934, also sings about justice which is delivered against the southern black man in a swift, sure, and severe manner.

On a Monday, Monday I was arrested.
On a Tuesday, locked up in jail.
On a We'n'sday, my trail [sic] was attested.
On a Thursday, nobody wouldn't go my bail.

(Lomax and Asch, 1962:79)

A similar verse is also found in Gellert's collection from South Carolina in 1934. Only "justice" is a bit swifter in this case. This inmate is "Chain Gang Bound" by Thursday.

Well on a Monday, Monday I was arrested,
Well on a Tuesday, Tuesday I was tried,
Well on a Wednesday, Wednesday I was sentenced,
And on Thursday, Thursday I was Chain Gang bound.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:186)

The following verses from Leadbelly's "Shreveport Jail" describe the sheriff, the dishonest lawyer, and the harsh judge in the South who quickly dispense "justice." Leadbelly wrote this song when he "was in de fiel's, workin' hard . . . I 'gin to think 'bout Shreveport, Lou'siana. I think about how de lawyer done me. I think about how de sheriff put me in jail. I begin to sit down there an' make me up an ol' song."
Oh, the sheriff, he will 'rest you,
Bound you over in jail,
Can't get nobody,
To go your bail.

**Lead Belly Speaks**

You get a lawyer for your friend. An' when you come
to find out yourself, you's somewhere wid a thousand
years in de pen.

**Lead Belly Sings**

Send for your lawyer,
Come down to yo' cell,
He'll swear he can clear you.
In spite of all hell.

**Lead Belly Speaks**

He gonna get de bigges' of your money an' come back
for some more.

**Lead Belly Sings**

Git some o' your money,
Come back for de res'.
Tell you to plead guilty,
For he know it is bes'.

**Lead Belly Speaks**

There sit the judge. You ain't thinkin' 'bout him.
You get to go befo' de judge.

**Lead Belly Sings**

An de judge he will sentence you;
Clerk will write it down,
You can bet you' bottom dollar,
You Angola-boun'.

There sets de judge,
I like to forgot,
De damnedes' rascal
De state ever picked out
Lead Belly Speaks

When de judge give you life—time, dey ain' nothin' you can look up to but de good Lawd in de sky.
The angels up in de heaven gonna take care of you.

(Lomax and Lomax, 1936:228-230)

From Joe Turney's "set up," to dishonest lawyers and harsh judges, the black inmates protest the inequities of the criminal justice system for them in the South. Black men knew that "White Folks Want Nigger Just for Work and Sweat."

White folks wantin' nigger
just for workin' and sweat,
Cut high, cut low.
Want him to cut sugar cane till he wringin' wet.
Swing fast, swing low.

Bend your back nigger and tote barrel to the lift,
Swing fast, swing low.
White folks sure holler if you ain't mighty swift,
Cut high, cut low.

Back done broken underneath the heavy load,
Swing high, cut low.
Same old chain gang up and down lonesome road,
Cut high, cut low.

Lord sure take care of us after we's all dead,
Cut high, cut low.
Like he do my buddy what earn bullet in his head,
Swing fast, swing low.

Oh Cap'n Oh Cap'n what make your reach so far,
Swing high, cut low.
From way down in hell where your rootses are,
Cut high, cut low.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:163)
Convicting the black man of something would ensure the use of his "work and sweat."

When Emancipation freed the slaves, some in the South made sure that they would still have control of and use the black man's labor essentially the same way they did before the Civil War. In order to ensure control of the blacks, southern states extended the black codes which had been used earlier to keep the free blacks and slaves under control. Black codes before the Civil War forbade the following activities by blacks: breaking curfew; leaving the plantation without a pass; five or more blacks congregating without a white person; owning firearms; buying liquor or gambling; and working in a drug store or printing shop. After the Civil War these codes were enforced against the free blacks. Additionally, "... the theft . . . of any kind of cattle or swine, regardless of value was considered grand larceny bearing a term of up to five years in the State Penitentiary" (Sellin, 1976:147, f.n.). This famous "pig law" and especially the enforcement of vagrancy and loitering laws enabled the South to maintain control of this population of newly freed blacks. Now the "law" would be used to keep both black men and women "in their place." And as revealed by Joe Turney's activities, sometimes the law was stretched beyond its limits. Though vagrancy and loitering were
illegal activities, evidence does suggest that such laws were primarily enforced against the blacks (Berry and Blassingame, 1982:234,237).

The following piece of music, collected by Gellert in the early 1930s in Atlanta, Georgia, expresses the frustration of being picked up for "Standin' on the Corner, Weren't Doin' No Harm."

Standin' on the corner, weren't doin' no harm, Up come a policeman, grab me by the arm.
Blow a little whistle, ring a little bell, Here come patrol wagon, a runnin' like hell.
Judge he call up, and ask my name, I tells him for sure, I weren't to blame.
He wink at the policeman, policeman wink too, He says nigger, you get some work to do.
Workin' on the road bank, shackle bound, Longest long, long time, for six months to roll 'round.
Miserin' for my honey, she miserin' for me. But Lord these white folks, won't let go holdin' me. (Harrah-Conforth, 1984:164)

A verse from another song in Gellert's collection expresses the same frustration.

Forty-'leven blue coats, come follerin' after me, When I arn't done me nothin', Why can't they let me be?

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:181)
In another song collected by Gellert from convicts on a chain gang in Birmingham in the early 1930s, the black man asks what you would have him do. There are no legitimate jobs for him. That's why he's standing on the "Streets in Birmingham." Tongue in cheek, he asks, "Do you want me to be bad like Jessie James?"

I was standing on the Streets in Birmingham
I was standing on the Streets in Birmingham
One dime was all I had.

Do you want me to be bad like Jessie James
Do you want me to be bad like Jessie James
Gimme two six shooters so I can highway rob and steal

(Cap'n You're So Mean, Rounder Records 4013)

However, southerners did not generally have to wait for the blacks to be pushed to such extremes as armed robbery in order to brand them as criminals and bring them into the incarcerated work force. Throughout the Black Belt in the South, not only vagrancy and loitering were typical crimes, but no visible means of support, drunkenness, lewd and obscene conduct, abusive language and disturbing the peace were also offenses which brought blacks into the convict work force. "I got drunk, I got in jail" (Harrah-Conforth, 1984:149). "Police caught me drinken' booze, he give choice of any jail house I choose" (Harrah-Conforth, 1984:147). In fact, many musicians found themselves in the local jail at the end of an all-
night jam session, for getting drunk. And when blacks committed more serious crimes such as stealing someone's hog, the famous "pig laws" took care of them. As already stated, such an offense could bring up to five years in the penitentiary.

It should be noted that a five-year sentence in the South meant just that. There was no time off for good behavior. But of even more serious consequence, in many southern states, just after the Emancipation until well into the 1930s and 1940s, a five-year sentence could mean death. Conditions of work were so bad on the leased farms, in the turpentine camps, railroad and road chain gangs that inmates were lucky if they survived five years. It has been suggested that a five-year sentence was in actuality a death sentence (Cable, 1969).

From 1882-1887, the annual death rate among Mississippi convicts was 15%. In the first twelve years under the lease system in Georgia, nearly one-third of the prisoners died or escaped; in South Carolina, the proportion was about one-fourth. In 1869, . . . the death rate among Alabama convicts was 41 percent (Van Deusen, 1938:124).

Imagine, then, the frustration of the black man who is " . . . So Deep In Trouble" in the following song. The system is not satisfied with charging the man with simple stealing. They are going to make sure they have use of his labor for a long time-- "forty years on hard rock pile" -- to be exact.
I'm So Deep In Trouble

I'm so deep in trouble,
white folks can't get me straight,
Stole me a hog, charge me with murderin' case.

Carry me to court house and give me my trial,
Got me sentence forty years on hard rock pile.

Wearin' double shackles, from head on down my knees,
Eatin' nothin' 'cept slop
made from corn bread and peas.

Went to the walker and head bossman too,
Please all you big white folks, see what you can do.

Say alright you nigger, won't forget you no how,
Come 'round and see me, 'bout forty years from now.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:189)

But even before sentencing and before the transferman
came to take the inmates to the state penitentiary or
chain gang or lessee's farm, time was spent in some local
jail. What the conditions of the jails were and how the
inmates felt about the conditions is described in the
following song.

Lice in Jail

Lice in jail as big as a whale
When you touch 'em on the bottom
they wiggle their tail.
Hard times in jail hard times,
Hard time in jail boys, hard times.

Fix up the pallet, blanket and rugs,
An' we lie down an' cover with bugs,
Hard times in jail boys, hard times.
Hard times in jail an' this we all know,
If you don't want to die you better not go,
Hard times in jail hard times,
Hard times in jail boys, hard times.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:150)

Although descriptions of such conditions in jail abound in folk music, "Lice in Jail" portrays these conditions in vivid detail.

In addition to "Lice in jail, everywhere I'll lay my head" (Harrah-Conforth, 1984:153), in the following song Leadbelly expresses the psychological deprivation and frustration of being locked up in jail.

Jail-House Blues

The ol' jail house git h'nted to a man. When you in jail, look like col' chills runs all over you. It kills a man to stay there if it's not but a day.

Lead Belly Sings:

Thirty days in the workhouse, six long months in jail,
Thirty days in the workhouse, six long months in jail,
Now they got me in trouble, no one to go my bail.

Lead Belly Speaks:

This po' man, he was beggin' to get outta jail. His wife had tol' him that night, she says, "Daddy, please doncha leave home." He poked out his mouth an' went on anyhow. An' fo' day nex' mornin' he was locked up in jail an' had thirty days an' six months hung up over his head 'fo' he could git back home to his sweet mamma. An' atter he sit down there in the jail house, he 'gin to think at night. He had lots of friends but wouldn' no friends come around to see him. He 'gin to crin':
Lead Belly Sings:
When a man git in trouble, ev'ybody turns him down,
When a man git in trouble, ev'ybody turns him down,
Now I b'lieve to my soul that I'm prison-bound.

Lead Belly Speaks:
The ol' jail house got ha'nted to the man. When you
in jail, look like col' chills runs all over you. It
kills a man to stay there if it's not but a day. The
man begin to think about his wife. He run up to the
jailer when he come up there to lock de do' an' feed
the man. He run up to the jailer beggin' for mercy:

Lead Belly Sings:
Now, please, Mister Jailer, unlock de do' for me,
Aw, please, Mister Jailer, unlock de do' for me.
The jail house is full of blues
 an' they done come down on me.

(Lomax and Lomax, 1936:152-155)

Both physical and psychological deprivations then
assault the inmate in jail.

But the jail is just the beginning of what the
inmates know lies ahead. In the South, they will most
likely be sent out on some work detail, whether it is the
chain gang on the roads or to a lessee who will work them
on the railroads, in turpentine camps, in the woods
logging, or in the fields picking cotton and cutting sugar
cane. It is the conditions of the long, hard, strenuous
labor under the unrelentingly hot southern sun which in
fact contributes to many deaths. The days are long, from
sunup to sundown and longer.
An inmate from Angola in Louisiana recalls the conditions:

Back in 1937, times was hard and work was hard. . . .
Go in the cell room sometime you'd be feelin' bad.
Somebody across the cell room would holler, 'John Henry.'
The back water on the levee'd be risin'.
You know what that would call for—plenty work!
Sometime twelve o'clock at night you raise out yo' bed, workin' from then until twelve o'clock the next night (Prison Worksongs, LFS-A5).

In addition, the days are intolerably hot. There is a preoccupation with the sun which the inmates call
"Hannah." "The heat is something that is always there . . . in July, 105 degrees in the shade" (Jackson, 1972:xix).

Go down, Ol' Hannah, doncha rise no mo'
If you rise any mo' bring judgment day.

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:59)

Woh, Lord, it's rainin'
an' the sun is shinin' bright,
Woh, Lord, the sun is shinin',
Woh, Lord, both night an' day,

The men at Ellis Camp in Texas, March 1966, sing

When old Hannah go to beaming,
WHEN OLD HANNAH GO TO BEAMING,
WHEN OLD HANNAH GO TO BEAMING,
LORD GODAMIGHTY
WHEN OLD HANNAH GO TO BEAMING,
WHEN OLD HANNAH GO TO BEAMING,
WHEN OLD HANNAH GO TO BEAMING,
IN THE LONG HOT SUMMER DAYS.
On another occasion they sing:

I say go down old Hannah . . .
Don't rise no more . . .
If you rise in the mornin' . . .
Bring judgement sure . . .

(Jackson, 1972:114)

Perhaps the following quote from the men themselves explains their perception of Hannah.

Everybody about to give out, and they hopin' for the sun to go down. Singing the sun to go down: "Go down, Hannah, don't rise no more, if you rise in the mornin' bring judgment sure." Furthermore, we so tired, we rather see judgment than see another day of hard labor like this (Jackson, 1972:114).

Not only the sun and the long days are their enemy, but the guards who are called "captain" or "rider" are continuously watching the inmates to make sure they are not sloughing off.

My Bossman name was Sammy,
The meanest dog I ever know,
Speak soft 'cause he got more eyesights,
Than old Devil down below.

I tell you how this man think,
Black man just like Betsy mule,
You got to beat him every day,
To make you know that he the rule.

I tell you how this man do,
Black man under his command,
Short time, double lifer same,
You never leave that Devil's land.
He ring you mornin' fore the light,
In most any kind of weather,
And if you think you sleep some more,
You find out you hadn't better.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:138)

The convict pleads:

Please have mercy . . .
Have mercy on me, sir . . .
Well I'm tryin' to make it . . .
I'm tryin' to make it in a hurry . . .

(Jackson, 1972:263)

But he is not working fast enough and the captain approaches. He knows he is going to be beaten.

Yonder come de cap'n;
Better go to drivin';
Ridin' like he's angry;
Lord I'm in trouble;

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Well, he's got his bull-whup;
Cowhide in his other han'

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Bully went to pleadin';
I'm a number one driver;
Cap'n, let me off, suh;
Wonch' low me a chance, suh?
Bully, low down yo britches;
Put it off no longer;
The bully went to holl'in;
An' de cap'n hollered, "Hold him";
Cancha hear th' bully squallin'?
Cancha hear th' bully screamin'?

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:82)
But it is not just the whip that the convicts on the line are worried about. They worry about being one of those who do not make it at all.

You ought to been on the river in nineteen-four; you could find a dead man on ever' turn row.

(Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs, and Ballads, APS L3)

Well I look at my partner,
("That's the one on the row with you")
He was almost dead.
I say, "Oh, wake up, old dead man,
Help me carry my row.
("This is what his partner say when he couldn't hardly make it")
I can't hardly go, I can't hardly go." . . .

(Jackson, 1972:118)

Beyond the arduous work which may kill them, other inmates such as Robert Pete Williams, a "lifer" at Angola, Louisiana in the 1950s, worries about staying alive but not because of work, nor being beaten by the guards. By the late 1950s in Angola, the inmates claim it is not near as bad as it was in the 1930s. However, Williams, perhaps similar to other lifers, appears to be losing the will to live.

Sometime I feel like, baby, committin' suicide . . .
I got the nerve if I just had anythin' to do it with.
I'm goin' down slow, somethin' wrong with me . . .
I've got to make a change while that I'm still young, If I don't I won't get old.

(Angola Prisoner's Blues, LFS A-3, 1958)
"Long time men" have both physical and psychological concerns. After they have been imprisoned for a long time, they lose contact with their family and friends outside. Even when they get letters, it is difficult for them. In the following verse, an inmate from the State Farm at Parchman, Mississippi in the early 1930s expresses the frustration and longing he feels:

Ev'y mail day, mail day I git a letter,
"My Son, come home, my Lawd, son, come home."

My baby sister, sister keeps on a-writin',
"Buddy, come home, my Lawd, buddy, come home."

I cain' read her, read her letter for cryin',
My time's so long, my Lawd, my time's so long.

Dat ol' letter, letter read' about dyin',
My tears run down, my Lawd, my tears run down.

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:85)

In other verses, the inmates describe what it's like for a "long time man" when the family isn't writing.

Make a long time man, oh, feel bad,
When he can't, oh, get a letter from home.

Oh there must, oh, be a wreck on the road,
'Cause I can't, oh, get a letter from home.

(Prison Work Songs, LFS A-5)

In 1964, on Ellis Camp in Texas, Maze Mack sings:

Make a longtime man feel bad,
I don't get no letter, I don't hear from home,
Make a longtime man feel bad.
Long time, 'Berta, for to hear, waitin' on,
She don't write no letter, I don't hear from home.
Make a longtime man feel bad.

(Jackson, 1972:78)

It is not just their mothers and sisters that the convicts want letters from. The songs they write are full of the longing for their wives and girlfriends they left behind. In the 1960s in Texas, Jackson collected songs from one inmate in which eighteen stanzas were about "his woman" (1972:37). In Leadbelly's "Jail-House Blues" he "begin to think about his wife." In "Early One Mornin'/Prison Boun'," the inmate "... was thinkin' of my baby, an' my happy home."

Early one mornin', my blues come fallin' down,
I was thinkin' 'bout my baby, an' my happy home.

Baby you may never see my smilin' face again,
Baby you may never see my smilin' face again.

When I had my trial, baby you could not be found,
Now it's too late purty mistreatin' mamma,
I'm prison bound.

(Variant verses:)

Early one mornin', blues come fallin' down,
Early one mornin', blues come fallin' down,
I's all locked up in jail, and prison bound.

All night long I sat in my cell alone,
All night long I sat in my cell alone,
I was thinkin' of my baby, an' my happy home.
Sometime I wonder why don't you write to me,
Sometime I wonder why don't you write to me,
If I been a bad feller, I never intended to be.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:144)

The inmates are concerned when "their women" do not
write, not because there is a "wreck on the road," but
because of the real possibility of another man.

I got the cold penitentiary blues, poor boys,
I got the cold penitentiary blues,
Just thinkin' of the girl I love,
I got the cold penitentiary blues.

... Just thinkin' of the girl I love,
she run away with another man.
She run away with another man, poor boys,
she run away with another man.
She run away with another man, poor boys,
she run away with another man.

(Jackson, 1972:64)

Finally, Iron Head, a Texas "lifer," broke down and
cried while he sang "Shorty George." "Shorty George" was
the gasoline motor car which took the women away after
they visited their men on Sundays in the Texas prison
system.

Well-a, Shorty George, he ain' no friend of mine,
Well-a, Shorty George, he ain' no friend of mine,
Taken all de womens an' leave de mens behin'.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Got a letter f'um my baby,
"Come, at once, she's dyin'"--
She wasn' dead, she was slowly dyin'.

...
How kin you blame po' man f'um cryin'
When his babe ain' dead, but slowly dyin'? . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"My woman, she's sca'd to come to see me; she might as well be dead. So I gets restless, an' I want to run away f'um dis place. I jes' cain' hardly stan' to sing dat song."

(Lomax and Lomax, 1934:200)

Whether it is the intolerable conditions of incarceration or the "worries" about their families and "their women" that drive them to it, inmates "... want to run away f'um dis place." If they do not actually attempt or successfully accomplish escape, they fantasize about it. The lyrics of many prison folk songs reflect this fantasy.

Oh Lawd Mamie

If my captain come in call me
If my captain come in call me
Tell him I'm goin', tell him I'm goin'.

If he asks you Lawd was I runnin'
If he asks you Lawd was I runnin'
Lawd tell him I was flyin'.

---

It should be noted how difficult it is to successfully escape from many southern prisons. At Angola, the state penitentiary in Louisiana, it is an extraordinary feat to escape successfully. Angola is surrounded on three sides by the Mississippi River and bordered on the fourth side by the Tunica Hills. The prison farms in Texas are equally difficult to escape from, as most of them are also bordered by a river, the Brazos, a treacherous and difficult one to cross.
Oh Lawd Mamie my side hurtin',
Oh Lawd Mamie my side hurtin',
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:124)

"Long John," a folk song which has been used accompanying various types of work over the years, describes the escape of a "... legendary character ... who outran the police, the sheriff, the deputies with all their bloodhounds and escaped from jail to freedom" (Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs and Ballads, AFS-13:12).

LEADER:

It's a long John,
He's a long gone,
Like a turkey through the corn
Through the long corn.

CHORUS:

Well, long John,
He's long gone,
He's long gone.
Mister John, John,
Old Big-eye John,
Oh, John, John,
It's a long John.

Says-uh: "Come on, gal,
And-uh shut that do',"
Says, "The dogs is comin' And I've got to go."

It's a long John,
He's a long gone,
It's a long John,
He's a long gone.
"Well-a two, three minutes,  
Let me catch my win';  
In-a two, three minutes,  
I'm gone again."

He's long John,  
He's long gone,  
He's long gone,  
He's long gone.

He's John, John,  
Old John, John,  
With his long clothes on,  
Just a-skippin' through the corn.

Well, my John said  
On the fourth day,  
Well, to "tell my rider  
That I'm on my way."

(Riley· is another prototype of an escaping prisoner who can outrun dogs, horses, and guards and successfully escape. In fact, according to the Lomaxes (1936:121),  
"... when the Negro convict gangs sing about old Riley, the guards loosen their six-shooters in their scabbards and rub their sun-wearied eyes."

It was July an' Augus',  
It was July an' Augus',  
They was long, hot summer days,

When ol' Riley taken a notion,  
Ol' Riley taken a notion,  
In dem long, hot summer days;

Taken a notion to walk de water,  
Taken a notion to walk de water,  
In dem long, hot summer days.
Ol' Riley was a-leavin',
Ol' Riley was a-leavin',
In dem long, hot summer days.

Ol' Rattler come a-rollin',
Ol' Rattler come a-rollin',
In dem long, hot summer days.

Ol' Rattler went out a-rovin',
Ol' Rattler went out a-rovin',
In dem long, hot summer days.

Ol' Rattler couldn' trail him,
Ol' Rattler couldn' trail him,
In dem long, hot summer days.

He was a-barkin', "Hoo-oo-oo-oo,"
He was a-barkin', "Hoo-oo-oo-oo,"
In dem long, hot summer days.

Ol' Riley walked de water,
Ol' Riley walked de water,
In dem long, hot summer days.

Ol' Riley, farewell,
Ol' Riley, farewell,
In dem long, hot summer days.

(Harrah-Conforth, 1984:124)

In addition, inmates in Angola, Louisiana in the late 1950s still sing of escape.

Well I runnin'
Mile a second [?]
Up that ninety mile
Long Hill

(Prison Work Songs, LFS A-5)

Finally, the inmates in Texas in the 1960s sing about Ol' Rattler, the prototype of the tracking hound, "... who can follow any trail, walk a log, swim the treacherous
Brazos river. Bruce Jackson was told that it is traditional to name at least one dog on each farm 'Rattler' (Jackson, 1972:313).

Wake Up Dead Man

Won't you here, here, Rattler,
HERE, RATTLER, HERE
A-won't you here, here, Rattler,
HERE, RATTLER, HERE!

Won't you seek him old Rattler,
won't you bite him old Ring,
HERE, RATTLER, HERE,
Won't you seek him old Rattler,
won't you bite him old Ring,
HERE, RATTLER, HERE!

Well old Rattler he was a Walker . . .
(repetition and burden continue as above)
He could swim big Brazos, he could walk a log . . .
Well it's here, here, Rattler . . .
Well I b'live I've got three trustys gone . . .
Well ole Eatem, ole Beatem,
ole Cheatem done gone . . .
Well ole Rattler here's a marrow bone . . .
You can eat that meat, you can leave it alone . . .
"I don't want no marrowbone . . .
Well I want that bully that's long gone" . . .
Well it's soon one mornin' . . .
When I heard that sergeant blow his horn . . .

(Jackson, 1972:292)

However, as already noted, some inmates such as "Riley" can even escape from "Ol' Rattler."
CONCLUSION

It is evident that the song lyrics of the incarcerated blacks illustrate a keen consciousness of the troubles that followed the black men in the South—troubles which were often engineered by the white men under the guise of the "law." They also reveal the pains of imprisonment which have always been part of the incarceration experience: loss of freedom; loss of autonomy; lack of heterosexual relationships; lack of material goods and services; and lack of physical safety. Moreover, they illustrate a protest about the inequities of the criminal justics system which brought about both physical and psychological pain for the southern black convict.

Perhaps, however, there is one more "pain of imprisonment" that has been neglected: lack of stimulation or boredom. Beyond physical and psychological pain, prison is a dull, dreary, monotonous, and boring place to be. The routine is the same, day after day: the same food, the same faces, and the same restricted geographical place, without escape.

Found in Leadbelly's "Midnight Special" (Lomax and Lomax, 1936:222) in the 1930s, in Gellert's collection of the 1920s (1939:13), in Parchman, Mississippi in the 1940s
(Negro Prison Songs from the Mississippi State Penitentiary, TLP-1020) and in Texas in the 1960s (Jackson, 1972:272), "Early in the Morning" sums up the work, the worries, and the overall monotony of incarceration for the southern black man from 1920 to 1960.

Well, it's early in the MORNING, when the DINGDONG RING,
Go a-marching to the TABLE, got the SAME DAMN THING. Well, it's nothing on the TABLE, but the SPOON AND THE PAN,
Well, you SAY ANYTHING ABOUT IT, catch THE HELL OUT THE MAN
Hollerin' oh MY LORDY, OH MY LORDY, LORD, HOLLERIN' OH MY LORDY, OH MY LORDY, LORD

Well, I'm down in the BOTTOM, on a LIVE OAK LOG, Well, I'm down THERE ROLLIN', like a LOWDOWN DOG. Well, the captain and the SERGEANT, come a RIDING ALONG, Say, "You better GO TO HAMING, IF YOU WANT TO GO HOME." Hollerin' oh MY LORDY, OH MY LORDY, LORD, HOLLERIN' OH MY LORDY, OH MY LORDY, LORD.

Partner got to hold 'em, hold 'em no LONGER, Godamighty KNOWS, Godamighty KNOWS Partner who's the RIDER, partner who's the RIDER.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Wo Lord, GODAMIGHTY KNOWS. Partner got TO HELP ME, help me TO CALL 'EM, Help TO CALL 'em, Godamighty KNOWS. Make it dead easy, make it dead easy GODAMIGHTY KNOWS, GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.

---

5 Haming means working. It is probably derived from an illusion to hammering (Jackson, 1972:312).
Believe I'll call for water,
GODAMIGHTY KNOWS, GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.
Waterboy, oh waterboy,
Bring me DRINK A WATER, BRING ME DRINK OF WATER,
GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.
Don't want TO DRINK IT, DON'T WANT TO DRINK IT,
GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.
POUR IT ON MY DIAMOND, POUR IT ON MY DIAMOND.
Diamond STRIKIN' FIRE, God AMIGHTY KNOWS,
Hollerin' WO LORD, GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.

Partner's GETTIN' WORRIED, PARTNER'S GETTING WORRIED.
Worried 'BOUT MABEL, Mabel and the BABY.
GodaMIGHTY KNOWS.
Hollerin' WO LORD, GodAMIGHTY KNOWS.
Partner I got to LEAVE, partner I got to LEAVE.
LEAVE YOU DOGGIN',
Doggin' with THE CRANE, GodaMIGHTY KNOWS,
Hollerin' WO LORD, GodAMIGHTY KNOWS,
GODAMIGHTY KNOWS.

Partner I'M GETTIN' WORRIED,
partner I'M GETTING WORRIED,
Worried 'bout MABEL, Mabel and THE BABY
Mabel and THE BABY, Godamight KNOWS,
Hollerin' WO LORD, GodAMIGHTY KNOWS.
Partner can't HOLD ME, partner can't HOLD ME,
Hold me with his . . . [end of tape 451]
. . . Godamighty knows.
Believe I'LL CALL THE GOVERNOR,
believe I'LL CALL THE GOVERNOR
"What you gonna tell him?" Tell him I'm in TROUBLE,
Tell him I'M IN TROUBLE, Godamight KNOWS.
The the way I CALL HIM,
Hollerin' WO LORD, Wo LORD GOVERNOR,
Godamight KNOWS, Godamight KNOWS,
Wo MY LORD . . .

(Jackson, 1972:272)
CHAPTER VII

THE 1980s COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, inmates still create music and write songs in the 1980s. Prisoners' songs of the current decade exhibit both differences from and similarities to that music which was previously found among the incarcerated. In this chapter the styles, themes, and functions of contemporary prison music will be described. Additionally, a picture of typical inmate songwriters and reasons why they write will also be included. Finally, the ways in which contemporary prison songs differ from and yet maintain similarities to previous songs of the incarcerated will be described and analyzed in the following chapter.

THE MUSIC: STYLES, FUNCTIONS, AND THEMES

What is the music written by prisoners of the 1980s? Not surprisingly, the types of music found in prison
represent almost every style of music played outside the walls. Everything from old-time country, white man's blues, rock and roll, acid rock, rockabilly, the blues, gospel, contemporary black music, and even a song with a reggae beat appears in the current collection.

**STYLES**

The styles or types of songs vary, but in general they are consistent with the inmates' cultural heritage. Black inmates do not report country songs. There are no Charlie Prides within the prisons where this research was conducted. In addition, white inmates write few rhythm and blues and no reggae, blues, soul, or jazz tunes, although after some deliberation, one white inmate described his song as "white man's blues." Another black inmate explains that his song is to be sung in the same style as Smokey Robinson, who is a popular contemporary black singer who records for the Motown record label, which records primarily black musicians. Only white inmates report writing rock and roll tunes, whereas only black inmates report writing rhythm and blues. Only one white inmate reports a song categorized as gospel. On the other hand, many black inmates report gospel music, and it is not music that one would likely hear in any white
church. Not only are the tunes part of the black cultural tradition, but also some of the words are part of the dialect of the black religious tradition. (See "The Love of Jesus," page 308 and the explanation of "fes." Upon first hearing this song, this researcher thought that "fes" was a contraction for confess.)

Also in characteristically black style, some of the black male songwriters who played their songs during the interview sang in a falsetto. None of the white inmates used such a style. Yet the southern white inmate in his fifties used the high-pitched nasal tone reminiscent of the old style of Anglo-American ballads.

Finally, most of the contemporary tunes sound like songs which one would hear on any commercial radio station. There are only a couple of inmate songwriters who sing their tunes in styles similar to the old folk tunes. Stylistically, the tradition of the folk song as such no longer exists in the prison of the 1980s. Yet, as will be seen from the following examination of the words, many of the lyrical themes of inmates' songs are consistent with the themes of the earlier folk songs.
FUNCTIONS

These songs and the act of songwriting serve various functions for the inmates. Entertainment; psychological catharsis; an outlet for tension, frustration, and sorrow; communication about that which is unspeakable: protest, homosexual relations, fear, and anger; mental escape; a way of "passing the time"; and a "struggle to escape boredom" are just some of the functions of writing and playing music for contemporary inmates.

Similar to outside "the walls," music and songwriting in a very general sense serve as entertainment for the prisoners. Entertainment can be directed to a potentially public audience, as many inmates reported that they hope to eventually publish and record their music. A couple of the men had already not only published some of their songs but had also recorded some albums before they were imprisoned. Entertainment can also be directed to their fellow prisoners-- either to small groups who get together to play or to the total population of the prison during a prison-staged show. A few of the men who contributed their songs to this research were part of a gospel group which regularly played and sang in the weekly religious services in the prison. Some inmates write songs for a much more private audience. Many of these songs serve as
a vehicle of personal communication with their loved ones: present and ex-lovers and wives, children, and parents. One of the white female inmates reported that she wrote "When Will You Be with Me?" as a love letter to her inmate husband from whom she had been separated for many years. (They had both been tried, convicted, and imprisoned for the same charge and would be serving many more years in prison.) Another white male inmate wrote "Nothing Left for Me" "... as a letter to my wife, when our marriage relationship was breaking down." It was written as a "... prayer or a plea to my wife, to be strong and hold on to the love we have, as a brief description of my dependence on her happiness."

Nothing Left for Me

Living without you ... is like living (all) alone;
There's no-one to talk to ... or to call on the (telephone) phone;
My days seem so empty ... Doesn't matter where I am ...
Stuck in this big metal cage ...
or out on the streets, again ...

(8 bar instrumental)

Living without you ...
is the worst thing there could be...
Life loses its meaning ...
and it's slipping fast from me ...
I gave up on smiling ...
and my eyes have run out of tears
And living without you ...
is the only thing that I fear ...
Chorus:
I know it's hard waiting
For a man such as me
It won't be much longer
Once again . . . I will be free
But I'll be in prison . . .
All my life-- Can't you see?
Cause living without you
Means there's nothing . . . left for me . . .

(8 bar instrumental)

Yes, living without you . . .
is like living (all) alone . . .
I find no pleasure . . .
in the things that I own . . .
Is there a letter? . . . Or a song I could write?
That would bring you to me . . .
on this lonely, lonely night?

(Repeat Chorus)

Cause living without you . . .
means there's nothing left for me . . .
Yes, living without you . . .
means there's nothing left for me . . .
Yes, living without you . . .

(Music-- FADE)

Yet another inmate wrote a song "... to be played on the radio to get a girl back." "Stephanie was my fiancee for three or four months." The song was "... not actually about her, but to her." Although this song was written as a personal communication to his ex-fiancee, the man wanted the song to be played on the radio; he wanted a public vehicle to be used to communicate his personal plea to this woman.
Stephanie

Oh Stephanie
Can you hear me
What happen to the love you started
The flame still burns but I'm broken-hearted
Oh Stephanie
Do you hear me
I was much too young to understand
I only wanted to be your man
Oh Stephanie

Stephanie I always thought that you were hooked (Babe)
I didn't stop to take a second look
I didn't even stop to think of life
But always wanted to play with time
You see I've played all the games in life I didn't really understand
I was much too young but still tried to be a man
I wasn't really even ready yet
But the truth is Babe I loved you from the first day we met

Oh Stephanie
Can you see me
I'm only trying to explain
You see I'm really not the same
Oh Stephanie
Do you still want me
I've been away but now I'm free
I made this song for you to see
Oh Stephanie

Babe won't you give me that second chance (Sugar)
Cause I know now that I'm definitely a man
Here I am fresh on the line (Babe)
A free man now cause I've done my time
And is in the process of choosin you (Sugar)
Cause in a case like this what else does a man do
And its you Babe that has made this man of me
Babe now I'm a winner for you to see

Oh Stephanie
Babe listen, listen to me
You see the thrill real
And it's me baby
        it's the way I feel
Oh Stephanie
It's just you and me
I'll love you better today than yesterday
Just take my hand and we'll go all the way

Oh Stephanie
Oh Stephanie
Oh Stephanie
Oh Stephanie
Oh Stephanie

A few inmates write songs without any hope or desire to ever share it with any audience. The reasons for not wanting to share it include not thinking it is good enough, needing to work out some individual problem that is too personal to share with anyone, and simply entertaining themselves with a hobby to pass the time. One of the black female inmates wrote a song about "... my friend who hung herself. It's a tribute to her memory and asks why she chose this way." Another white inmate wrote the following song "... as a parable-- an easy way to share a story of spiritual truths."

Wrong Turn

She came riding on a horse ... down the boulevard;
All those that saw her ... stopped, and stared.
Seemed she'd always been such a friendly girl,
And a woman who really cared!
But she gave up on life
And on loving the world;
Now she's galloping away ... 
Her world fell apart ... 
And she wants a new start;
I hope she'll ride my way ... 
someday ...
I saw her turn left . . . at the end of the road
as I watched her from my place-- unobserved.
Now, she's out of my sight--
   God what gives her the right
To go through life being seen . . . but not heard?

   I would have listened,
   Had she spoken to me;
   Would have soaked up her every word!
   But that didn't happen . . .
   It was only my dream-- Do you
   Think I will ever learn?

   It's too late . . .
   Now she's galloped away
   On a horse in the afternoon--

   Oh, it's too late . . .
   And I made a mistake,
   Should have called to her from my room . . .

   She turned LEFT . . .
   At the end of the road,
   And I'm sure that she didn't know . . .
      A RIGHT turn is for PARADISE . . .
   The LEFT goes down below--

This inmate did not write his music to get it
published. As he explained, he

   . . . dwells on a 'message' idea, since so much music
is 'thrown together' for the purpose of money, and
care is not taken, nor respect given to developing a
unique, creative style. . . I've seen life clearly,
from both sides of the wall-- most people, and
especially convicts don't or can't look. They don't
care. Live today-- die tomorrow. Who cares?

Psychological catharsis also operates as a function
of songwriting for many contemporary inmates. Prisoners
reported that they wrote songs in order to work out
problems with their wives and lovers and with the
frustrations they experienced in the prison. As
previously noted, "Nothing Left for Me" operated for the inmate songwriter not only as a personal communication to his wife but also as a psychological catharsis for him. One white inmate wrote the following song because "This is what I felt and I needed to get it out."

Hindsight

What do I do with the plans that I made
Do I cast them out to the sea
I'm caught up in a world of charades
Where nothin' is important to me,
   I only want to be free
Fly away, Fly away

Do you know what it's like to wake up in the morn'
And find that nobody's there
Do you know what it's like to turn on the lights
And discover you're still very scared

The world has so much to offer me
Yet there's only so much I can take
God knows how long I'll be paying
For my single mistake

What do I do with the plans that I made
Do I cast them out to the sea
I'm caught up in a world of charades
Where nothin' is important to me,
   I only want to be free
Fly away, Fly away

I can just see the city lights
Out the window, through the bars
And the people I miss so very much
Driving by in their cars
People can you understand what drove me to my plight
Just for a moment can you try to forget what's wrong
And what's right
What do I do with the plans that I made
Do I cast them out to the sea
I'm caught up in a world of charades
Where nothin' is important to me,
    I only want to be free
Fly away, Fly away

Not all the expressions of the unspeakable are meant
for a private audience or meant to be kept from anyone.
As previously stated, that which cannot be said in
ordinary conversation can be safely expressed through the
words of songs. Some contemporary inmates, both black and
white, also protest overtly about the injustices of the
criminal justice system and the conditions in which they
find themselves. The song "Hindsight" may be primarily
interpreted as an expression of "self-blame" and remorse
for the "single mistake" which sent this inmate to prison.
However, "Hindsight" also reveals a real protest about the
loss of freedom and the separation from the real world—
the "... city lights out the window through the bars."

Moreover, this inmate can say out loud in song, "Do
you know what it's like to turn on the lights and discover
you're still very scared." It is rarely reported that men
in prison freely express their fear out loud to just
anyone. They certainly are not likely to talk about their
fear to another inmate, and many of them are not going to
tell their families because they do not want them to
worry. Yet the words of this song provide a vehicle for
the expression of this very real emotion which characterizes imprisonment for the inmate.

Another black inmate clearly protests and writes about his "... confusion and hate directed at a few people who know nothing about me, yet who passed judgment upon me about whether or not I was ready to leave prison." This inmate wrote this song "... after I was told I wouldn't be going home, which was, and still is, very confusing." He had been turned down by the parole board.

Something Fishie [sic]

There's something kinda fishie goin' on--
A whole lot of times I just can't understand it--
oh no,
I've got to get the train of thought--
my train of thought--
into the proper-- perspective.

You say you know me well,
but really you don't know me,
You don't even understand me,
but yet you sit and judge me.

I may not understand all that there is to know
but I do know that there's something kinda fishie going on,
A whole lot of times I just can't understand it, no--
I've got to get the train of thought,
my train of thoughts,
into the proper perspective--

"Something Fishie" clearly illustrates this inmate's reaction to an arbitrary decision on the part of the parole board, and the writing of this song serves as a
vehicle for expressing his frustration. However, most of the songs collected in the 1980s are not overt expressions of protest.

Homosexuality is also a common but verboten phenomenon of the prison community. Such expressions must be stated in covert manners, as any homosexual liaisons are forbidden. The following song clearly states the feelings of one black female inmate for another. She wrote it "... to get inside of a human being and feel the heart and soul and the essence of feeling." However, if the inmate had not reported the information to the researcher, the following text would appear to be a heterosexual love song.

Reach out your hand
Look into my eyes . . . yeah
Feel what I'm feeling
There won't be no surprise . . . yeah

Cause here I am
Here is where you ought to be
Look inside my eyes and I won't let you down

Reach out your hand
and be my forever queen
All life could bring is
the happiness you need
Reach out your hand.

(Chorus:)
Reach out your hand
Look into my eyes
Feel what I'm feeling
and there won't be no surprises
Cause I can't stop now even if I wanted to
I can't stop it . . . My God knows that
I can't stop it now . . .
Even if I wanted to.

(Chorus)

In this instance, the song serves to express that which cannot be said in ordinary conversation in the prison. Moreover, this woman was very concerned about singing this song on the tape for the researcher. She claimed that she was afraid she would sing too loud and the authorities would be annoyed with her because of the noise. She also stated that no matter what was told to the researcher by prison administrators, the researcher got to go home, and she (the inmate) would be left to suffer the consequences of her actions. One wonders if she were more concerned about the contents and purpose of the song rather than the loudness of it. Yet even though she had written other songs, it was this one about her feelings for another woman that she chose to sing and contribute to this study.

Inmates also write songs to mentally escape the reality of where they are. One inmate wrote a long letter after the personal interview, explaining why he did not write songs about the incarceration experience.

For the most part, in my writing, as well as all other areas of my life, I try to avoid placing emphasis on the fact that I am in prison, as I feel I have come a long, long way as far as human development is concerned, but I am serving a rather
lengthy sentence, and have very little contact with the outside world by way of mail or visits. I feel if I were to dwell upon the fact that I am incarcerated, it would be quite easy for me to allow myself to be swallowed up by this system and thus become useless as a human being. I feel also, that if I were to allow that to transpire, then I may as well just lay down and die and, believe me, that just wouldn't be me.

What kind of songs do inmates write to mentally escape the conditions they are in? One white male inmate contributed only satirical songs. One song is a satire of a "wannabe":

. . . someone who would like to be a biker, but cannot make the grade, so he effects the trappings in the hopes of impressing people. In doing this he makes a bad name for the "real" bikers with the people who can't tell the difference. [It is] written from the point of view of someone who is a "real" biker and has elitist beliefs about it.

The Wannabe

He's a member of the Harley-Davidson t-shirt owner's association
Got a red one, and a black one, belt buckle too
He's got a Harley decal on a piece of oak
He tries to pick up women, they think he's a joke
But a lotta people who don't know bikers think that he's one too

He don't know his ass from a hole in the ground and as close as he's come is to hear the sound of a Harley-Davidson rollin down the road.
But he'll argue with you for hours on end 'Bout a '53 knuckle" that was owned by a friend of his Dad's neighbor's brother
What a load

1 There is no such thing as a '53 knuckle. This is one thing that gives the "Wannabe" away to a real biker.
He's a member of the Harley-Davidson
t-shirt owners association
Got a blue one, and a white one, gonna get a tattoo
He's got this eagle decal on a piece of oak,
He tries to impress people, they think he's a joke
But a lotta people don't like bikers
'cause they think that he's one too

He gets drunk and stupid and beat up in bars
And he 'n his friends drive Japanese cars
He goes around callin' everybody "Bro."
He had a good woman but she left last Spring
When she found his talkin' didn't mean a thing
And she'n her new man split last week, rode to Mexico

He's a member of the Harley-Davidson
t-shirt owner's association
Got a red one, two black ones, belt buckle too
He's got a torn down Honda in the g'rage at his folks
He thinks he's a biker, we think he's a joke
But a lotta people don't know bikers
think that he's one too.

Also in a satirical vein, this same inmate wrote the
following song ". . . about a guy who thinks he's a great
lover, and hangs out in bars waiting for women to pick him
up."

I'm Here for You

If you want me honey, I'm standin' right here
Just walk right over, you can buy me a beer
'Cause I'm here, standin' here waitin' for you
Yes I'm here,
and it's true
I'm here for you

I'm here for you, babe, tonight's the night
You can take me home, I'll make you feel alright
Cause I'm here, standin' here waitin' for you
Yes I'm here
Don't make me blue
I'm here for you.
Bikes and women are fantasy escape subjects as well, bikes symbolizing the freedom and women symbolizing the sex and love denied to prisoners. Since the inmate can have neither, he satirizes those who have access to those things.

Other prisoners mentally escape by remembering the good times--people, places, and experiences--in their lives before they were incarcerated. The following song is about "...life in the day of a motorcyclist on the road." This one's not a "wannabe" but the memory of "...moving into the wind and ...forgetting the past."

Into the Wind

Life is like moving down a lonely road
With uphill climbs, at times a heavy load
Sometimes the road is straight,
    sometimes there's a curve
Riding this crank sure takes a lot of nerve.

(First Chorus:)
You keep on movin', don't know where you're at
A cranker's dream surely isn't a flat
Keep on moving, keep on moving, keep on a-movin'
Into the Wind.

Moving down this old lonely back street
A spring in the wind, a beat at your feet
Laid back on your crank, on these dusty old routes
A heck of a rate no breaks except for your boots.
(Second Chorus:)
You keep on movin', tryin' for them extra miles,
Maybe that's why a cranker never smiles
Keep on moving, keep on movin', keep on a-movin'
Into the Wind.

Riding on empty you don't move too fast,
Looking for a station, to fill up with gas.
You keep on moving because the highway's an old friend
And a cracked tank ain't easy to mend.

So you keep on movin', forgetting the past
Keep on moving and hopin' to last,
Keep on moving, keep on movin', keep on a-moving
Into the Wind.

Hometowns are also remembered because of the
familiarity and comfort of earlier days. "It's about the
town I live in, Tire Town, which is Akron. And even
though I thought it was the armpit of Ohio at one time, I
guess I do like it. I always go back."

Tire Town

Traveling around the country, going from bar to bar
Singing while playing my guitar
I've lived the hard life; I've lived too good
Paying my dues the way I should

I played so many bands and stops along the way
From the Big Apple out to L.A.
The city life is fun but you know it brings me down
Then I'm back in Tire Town

(Chorus:)
I'm back in Tire Town
And I'm never feeling down
On my own piece of ground
I'm back in Tire Town
I like Los Vegas and I like the Rockies too
Like it when I'm down in Malibu
I like the beaches and I like all kinds of girls
When I'm traveling around the world

But the northern girls know how to keep you warm
They give you shelter from the storm
And when it's snowing and it's blowing cold at night
They make you feel alright

(Chorus:
They say the Rubber City is burning out
They say it's gone-- there's no doubt
They say the factories have all packed up and left
They say to go out West

After everyone has packed up and gone
I'll still be singing my song
Here is where I was born and here is where I'll die
Don't bother asking why

(Chorus)

The same inmate wrote another song about another fond
memory, "... a lover, a friend and a sugar momma," all
rolled up into one:

Late Night Friend

It wasn't so very long ago
I was walking out in the blowing snow.
When she pulled up next to me
and asked me if I wanted a ride,
So I hopped in out of the freezing cold
She just smiled and said hello.
I felt my heater getting hotter
and my temperature starting to rise.

I'm not one to let a good thing slide through my hand
So I turned on all my charm as a loving man.
And I take my pleasures, take them where I find them
She turned on her bedroom eyes
and said come home with me.
I felt my heart pounding hard-- it wouldn't let me be.
And that is how I met my late night friend.

(Chorus:)
All she is, is my late night friend
All she is, is my late night friend
With a helping hand to lend
And I hope it will never end . . . no, no

I go and see her almost every night
And we make love until the dawn's daylight
And then I'm off, I'm off on my way, yeah!
And when I'm out in the red hot sun
Acting all crazy and just having fun
I go over to my baby's at night for a roll in the hay.

(Chorus:)
All she is, is my late night friend
All she is, is my late night friend
With a helping hand to lend
And I hope it will never end . . . no, no

She uses me just to get her thrills
And I use her to pay my bills
She don't care and neither do I. No!
Cause all I ever wanted was a late night friend
One that's got a helping hand to lend.
She helps me, I help her and that's no lie.

(Chorus-- then fade.)

Memories of the good times, then, sustain many of the inmates, particularly those who have a long time to serve. At least in song they can escape the reality of their day-to-day life in prison.

On another variation of mental escape, many inmates turn to God and religion in their frustration, loneliness, and self-doubt. One black inmate reported that he had an "experience with God" that led to his first song.
I get my songs in a direct revelation from God and I'm not crazy, just an instrument of God. The song is lifting up the name of his son Jesus Christ which has changed a lot of lives in here as I play [it] on Sundays. This song is a gospel song that is heart-touching, mind-blowing and life-changing.

It is not uncommon that people turn to religion in difficult situations. One of the common functions of religion is to deal with "... 'breaking points' beyond ordinary, daily experience. It provides 'answers' and offers the prospect of hope-- of spiritual intercession or magical control" (Vander Zanden, 1979:448). Inmates are cut off from family and friends, living in a condition with little hope. Religion and a belief that God knows, loves, understands, and forgives them enables the inmates to deal with the incarceration experience. In the words of one black inmate, "... no matter what happens to you in life, the most high God loves you and will always see you through if you trust him."

Hold On To His Hands

Every night on my knees I pray,  
help me stay humble before You night and day,  
I know how it is to have your back against the wall,  
I know how it is not to be able to stand tall,  
I'm going to

Hold-on, hold-on to His hands  
don't have to worry any more  
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands  
keep holding on, holding on
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
All it takes is a little faith
Hold-on Hey! to His hands

Now I'm here standing before you,
    I'm here proclaiming that God's word is true.
He seen me through my darkest day,
    I'm going to serve Him always,
    I'm going to

Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
you don't have to worry any-more
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
hold-on to God's unchanging hands
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
all you need is a little bit of faith
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands

I believe in the Father, I believe in the Son,
    also the Holy Ghost-- You're three in one.
I don't care what other people say,
    I'm going to serve Him for the rest of my days--
    I'm going to

Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
what are you going to do?
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
the Lord will see you through, see you through
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands
the world can't take Him away
Hold-on, hold-on to His hands

God's word says that there would be
    a great falling away
He said men would come and try to, try to,
    lead His children astray.
But let me tell you something,
    No matter what they say,
    and no matter what they may do,
    I know I know the Man will always see you through.
He's been better to me than I've been to myself.
He brought me out of sin and death,
    and all I want to do is

(Chorus)
The functions of songwriting for inmates vary perhaps as much as functions of songwriting do outside the walls. However, as evidenced by explanations given by the inmates, these various functions appear to fall into two general categories. Inmates write songs which deal directly with the fact that they are imprisoned. These songs deal with the reality of where they are, why they are there, and what the future holds for them. Yet as noted before, songwriting also deals with incarceration by not

... placing emphasis on the fact that I am in prison. ... I feel if I were to dwell upon the fact that I am incarcerated, it would be quite easy for me to allow myself to be swallowed up by the system and thus become useless as a human being.

The songs then function as an escape, at least a mental escape from the reality of imprisonment.

THEMES

Beyond the functions which these songs serve, the themes-- the subject matter of the lyrics-- vary also. Isolation; separation from family, parents, spouses, children, friends, and lovers; fantasies; protest about prison, the criminal justice system, and the American system as a whole; memories; future plans; and remorse for
the "single mistake" are all evident in the songs written by contemporary prisoners.

Inmates' songs reflect the theme of isolation in that they often contain lines that describe the separation from the real world, the world "outside the walls." In the song "Hindsight," the inmate reflects:

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I can just see the city lights
Out the window, through the bars
And the people I miss so very much
Driving by in their cars
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Another black inmate wrote the following song "... as an outlet for my feelings of loneliness. The song is about getting someone to realize that they have made a mistake and must pay for it."

**Customary Mary**

I see you looking in the mirror
and I know you should be wearing a smile.

So, I don't understand the reason
why I see a tear within your eye.

They say you used to be a leader;
one of grandure and fortitude.

They say now you don't even follow,
that you won't even take an attitude.

Now is it customary, Mary?
Or is it just a waste of time?

To give you help to such a helpless cause
then run to me looking for mine ...
I see you gazing through a window
and I notice that you smile at me.

But I can read between your facial line,
and see some points on which we disagree.

You tell me I'm the one who's crazy;
You say that I don't know my way around.

I ask you why your thoughts are hazy,
You say that people always let you down.

Now is this necessary, Mary?
Or is it something that you do for fun?

When I was needed I was caring
But it seems you were always on the run.

(Refrain)
I guess it's customary, Mary,
but I still think it's wasting time.
Though, seems to you time has no meaning;
so I don't need you wasting mine.

In the words of another black inmate, the following
song is "... about being released from prison. It is
about that day-- the last day of my life in prison."

The Last Day of My Life

Rain's coming down,
seems like it always is.
But why should I care,
what does it matter?

I don't hear birds singing
'cause there are too many other distractions.
But, then again,
solitude is not what I'm after.

A cool breeze blew by last night ... 
made me realize that this just ain't right.
But what is a man to do?
How can I change it?
Because if it were just another time of the day; or if it were just another day of the week; or if it were just another week of the year then it might not matter.

But this is the last time you'll hear from me; the last smile on my face you'll see; the last day of my life before my redemption.

This life has been called on account of the rain! The players just couldn't stand the pain. But, nobody gave any warning, there was no time.

A cool breeze might bring satisfaction if you realize its initial reaction. but it's kind of like wishing out loud that you'd never been born.

I can still feel the rain coming down. Seems like it always has been. But it doesn't matter, because, I think I've found a way to deal with it.

But if it were any old time of the day; or if it were any other day of the week; or if this were any other week of the year then I probably wouldn't even give a damn.

But this is the last time you hear from me. The last smile on my face you'll see. The last day of my life before my salvation.

When these lyrics were reported, this researcher knew immediately that there was something different and unique about this song. The songwriter was asked if he had been under any special security when this song was written. Sure enough, this one was written when the inmate was locked up in disciplinary segregation—the ultimate
isolation. Although the inmate says the song is about his release from prison, the underlying message implies suicidal thoughts.

However, isolation or separation from the real world is more often expressed not in a general statement but in a specific statement about the separation from loved ones-- the "people left behind."

Life So Cloudy

When the sun don't seem to shine,
and you think you're going out of your mind;
cause life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
life, so cloudy-- cloudy;

The people you left behind
seem to grow old with the times;
Yes life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
life, so cloudy-- cloudy;

So now you're trying to make it again
but you know you don't have no win;
Cause life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
life, so cloudy-- cloudy;

The love you used to share
is no longer waiting there.
Yes life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
life, so cloudy-- cloudy;

You're afraid to look around
Cause life has put you down.
Yes life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
life, so cloudy-- cloudy;

You better check it out
Life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
oh baby
Life, so cloudy-- cloudy;
Oh yeah . . .
The people left behind include family, parents, spouses, children, and lovers. One black inmate wrote:

On the telephone worrying Mom at home  
each and everyday  
This time is killing me Mama . . .  
I can't take it no more

Another white inmate wrote "I'm Insane" after he "... got a letter from the family. [His brother was] in Germany. [He was] thinking about possible war-- how everything's insane-- [He wrote this song] looking . . . for a peace in mind."

A black female inmate writes songs for her children. When they came to visit their mother at the prison they liked to sit on her lap and have her sing to them.

Not only do imprisoned mothers miss their children but imprisoned fathers do also, as the following song by a white inmate shows:

Little Miss Blue Eyes

When I held you on my lap today  
And looked into your eyes  
I suddenly fell in love with you,  
But it came as no surprise . . .  
Little Miss Blue Eyes  
Little Miss Blue Eyes.

And the games we played, helped me realize  
That I'm still a child within  
I'm so glad that you came to me;  
Life has meaning . . . once again!  
Little Miss Blue Eyes  
Little Miss Blue Eyes
(Faster)
Now life has meaning
When I see your smile
Just to hear you laughing
Makes it all worthwhile
And soon I'm coming home
I did this time for you
Don't forget to thank your mother too . . .
Blue Eyes!

Hey there-- Little Miss Blue Eyes!
I wrote this song just for you
I'll be home before you're grown
Then you can sing it too
Little Miss Blue Eyes
Little Miss Blue Eyes
Little Miss Blue Eyes

This song was written

. . . for my daughter, who I never yet got to know. [It was] written after a visit. [It's] about the strong love and feelings I have for my little blue-eyed daughter who at the time of this writing first met me as "Dad", since birth. Her visit and acceptance of me as her dad gave me an inner strength to go on.

Most frequently, however, male inmates write about their wives and lovers from whom they are separated. "'I Can See Her Waiting There' deals with my separation from my wife and the realization of just what she really means to me."

Men miss the physical closeness-- a touch-- a hug: "Needing tender love, wanting to be hugged but can't be with you honey." As already noted, another white inmate pleads with his wife "to hold on to the love [they] have":
I know it's hard waiting
For a man such as me
It won't be much longer
Once again . . . I will be free
But I'll be in prison . . .
All my life-- can't you see?
Cause living without you
Means there's nothing . . . left for me . . .

The following songwriter/inmate may be able to maintain the relationship with his fiancee. He only had approximately eight months' time to serve. He wrote the following song after the first couple of weeks in prison.

Your Love's a Brainstorm In Me

OH babe, you picked me up when I was nothing at all
Said you'd never leave me, girl, never let me fall
And now the time has come for me to pay my dues
Give you all my heart, all my love to you

Hold you close to me, take you in my arms
Whisper sweet nothings, fill you with my charms
With all the things that you are to me
I need your love, baby can't you see

(Chorus)
Your love's a brainstorm to me
Like a trip to Paris in my very own mind
Girl you swept me off, now I'm lost in time
OH can't you see that your drivin' me crazy
I love you baby, I love you lady
Because your love's-- a brainstorm in me

UM babe you taught me how to keep my spirits up high
And showed me there was more to life
than just live and die
OH girl in my eyes you see,
you hold the key to my very soul,
come-- take all of me
Just like the sun today, it shines so bright
And the moon and stars light up the night
The only peace for me my dear
is to have you baby, with me right here

(Chorus)

In 1961, an older white inmate in Tennessee wrote the following song about his marriage which occurred in prison. He was one of the few inmates who was allowed by the warden to marry inside the "walls." The woman in the song, Betty, was pregnant with his child.

Let me tell you of a place I love so well
It's down in Louisiana, and it's called Slidell

I met a girl there whose name is Betty
And I love her don't you see,
But we had a fight, so I left
And came right back to Tennessee

Then I was tried for murder
And got 99 in the penitentiary
And Betty caught a bus
And come all the way to Tennessee

She got permission from the Governor
To let her marry me
Then she got on that bus and went back to Louisiana
Don't you see

Now Betty's my sweet wife,
And I love her more than I can tell,
But it broke my heart
When she went right back to Slidell

(Chorus)
Slidell, Slidell a place that I love so well
If she will wait for me until I get out
I'm sure going back to Slidell
It is not likely that Betty will wait a lifetime. When the inmate was interviewed in 1984, it was then 23 years later, and he had seen neither Betty nor the twins who were born. She had sent him pictures of the children once.

"I'll Be the One Loving You Tonight" was written by an accomplished songwriter, who had his parole date and was "... going back, to my wife who's been waiting eight years." This inmate reported that he knew his wife saw other men over this long period of separation. That was all right with him because he knew that he was the most important man for her-- she really loved him-- she was mentally and emotionally committed to him all along.

Inmate after inmate wrote songs "... when their relationships with their women were breaking down." One white inmate heard that his wife was running around and responded with the following song.

Sweet Woman

I've done everything that a good man can do
So now I'm leaving it all up to you.
I know you've been drinking and playing around
Just like a kid on a merry-go-round

Some day you'll be sorry for what you have done
You paid for your fun
And when you start paying I won't be around
To pick up the pieces when you hit the ground
So wake up Sweet Woman before it is too late  
The door is still open so don't play with fate  
The flame is still burning-- with me you still rate  
So I beg you Sweet Woman don't change.

Similarly, another white prisoner wrote:

.................

If you hadn't gone to another,  
You still would be mine.  
If it wasn't for these hassles  
We have been going through.

(Chorus;)
I wouldn't be missing you  
If it wasn't for the blues.

If it wasn't for the blues  
I wouldn't be missing you tonight  
I know and so do you, two wrongs don't make it right  
If it wasn't for you leaving,  
All my dreams would come true.

(Chorus-- sung twice)

Still another black inmate came to the interview with at least 15 songs about the wife who had already divorced him and remarried someone else. He had a sentence of 14-50 years. He had served almost four years and did not know how much time he had left when he wrote the songs. Most of the lyrics of the songs reveal his longing, disappointment, and perhaps inability to face the reality of the loss of his wife. As the writer explained, "The main point in these lyrics is a man, in prison, and his wife or lady has left him all alone, and with all the love he has for her. She didn't even care." The following
excerpts from some of the verses of his songs illustrate his concern.

Now baby where you been-- don't leave me again
... Please baby stay-- don't go away

(from "I'm So Lonely Baby")

But you say you're going away
And my life won't be the same
Cause I need your love; baby, bring me your love
I got to have your love; baby, bring me your love

(from "Bringing Me Love")

Every time I turn around
Baby you keep putting me down
... Baby, how you do me wrong, every time I'm gone.

(from "Just Like the Bumble Bee")

I been away too long baby,
can't stop the hands of time.
And I want you to know sweet baby,
what I feel in my heart and mind

(from "I Want to be There")

I thought it would last forever,
through the good times, the bad-- and for better.
But Love, you turn your back on-on-on me,
and whole Love, I'm living in misery see

(from "Love Talking to Love")

You're looking all over town,
and it's nowhere to be found,
but you better watch it, when love is on the run

(from "Love Is On the Run")
When your're down baby, and there is nobody around
Will you remember now darling, how you put me down?
... But now I'm walking in the rain,
and I won't be the same

(from "The Rain")

The inmate also accuses her in the following song:

You act like you don't even care
You're out there running, everywhere;
But baby, what about love, oh baby,
what about love.

(from "What About Love")

Finally, this inmate wrote the following song which symbolically groups his ex-wife with the famous—perhaps infamous—women in history who did their men wrong:

Man to Woman

Oh Baby, Man to Woman-- Man to Woman;
Oh yeah, Man to Woman-- Man to Woman;

Now you say that you don't care
For the love that we share.
But man to woman, man to woman,
I know it could not last;
But man to woman, man to man,
you'll never get the past;

Man to woman-- man to woman; yeah baby,
Man to woman-- man to woman; oh yeah;
Man to woman-- man to woman.

When Eve mess around, poor Adam was out of town;
But man to woman; man to woman;
She went and put him down, all the way to the ground.
But man to woman-- man to woman;
you're never forget the past;
But man to woman-- man to woman,
you know that it could not last.
Man to woman-- man to woman;
When Delilah made her creep,
    poor Samson, he was asleep.
But man to woman-- man to woman;
She went and cut off his hair,
    and the secret show were there.
But man to woman-- man to woman,
you know it could not last;
But man to woman-- man to woman,
you're never forget the past.

Man to woman-- man to woman;
When poor Jack fell down the hill,
    who was left up there with Jill,
But man to woman-- man to woman;
Yes he waited that we know,
    but Jill, she never showed.
But man to woman-- man to woman;
you're never forget the past;
But man to woman-- man to woman;
you know that it could not last;
Man to woman-- man to woman;
you better stop your messing around;
Man to woman-- man to woman;
you better stop it-- stop it now;
Man to woman-- man to woman; yeah baby,
Man to woman-- man to woman; oh yeah,
Man to woman-- man to woman;

Men without women are constantly aware of this
separation from the opposite sex, this loss of
heterosexual relationships. Many have been in prison so
long, or will be in for such a long time, that their
spouses and lovers do not wait for them anymore. But they
write songs for the women anyway.

Living without you . . .
    is like living (all) alone . . .
My days seem so empty . . .
    Doesn't matter where I am . . .
Stuck in this big metal cage...
or out on the streets again...

Living without you...
Is the worst thing there could be...
Life loses its meaning...
and it's slipping fast from me...

Cause living without you
Means there's nothing... left for me...

"Tears of Sorrow" was written "... to express
myself due to past relationships."

Tears of Sorrow

Oooo baby don't you know
How much I love you so
But you're hurtin' me more and more
Pushing my love toward the door

(Chorus)
Don't play-- that way
You'll be needin' me some day
and you will cry
Tears of sorrow will flow from your eyes

Your love ain't what it seem to be
You always hurting me
But your time will come you see
And you'll be needin' me

(Chorus)

I can't take too much of this
My heart is having a fit
You're breaking it bit by bit
O-- Woman why don't you quit

(Chorus)
Now this is the very end
I won't lose, I must win
I will not even be your friend
Our love will be blowing in the wind

(Chorus)

Another inmate wrote "Stephanie" (page 262) because he wanted the song "... to be played on the radio to get a girl back." Stephanie was his fiancee for three or four months in 1978. He wrote the song in 1983.

Inmates also write about losing their women but pretending they still have them. The following song by a white inmate is typical of such a fantasy.

Make Believe
Make believe you love once again
Every once in awhile, it's good to pretend
Make me believe this broken heart of mine will mend
Show me why a good love has to end.

(First Chorus:)
Stay with me, I'm asking as a friend
Make believe you love me, once again
Make believe you love me, once again
Make me believe you got some time to lend to a friend
Like the colors of the rainbow we will blend.

Tell me now before we say our goodbyes.
Stay and wipe these tears away from my eyes.

(Second Chorus:)
So stay with me, I'm asking as a friend
Make believe you love me once again
Make believe you love me, make believe you love me
Make believe you love me once again.
Finally, one black inmate wrote "You Equal Inspiration" when he was really depressed and needed a figure to relate to. It was almost like having a person there. [He wrote the song] to have someone to be strong for-- to take the discipline and agony and return home. But there was not anyone-- he had made up someone.

Inmates primarily remember and try to maintain relationships with their families and loved ones. When those attempts fail they then at least hold on to those relationships in their minds.

In addition to the people they love, inmates also write about the good times and the places they remember outside "the walls." "Into the Wind" (page 279) plays back the memory of the feeling of freedom "... in the day of a motorcyclist on the road." Hometowns are remembered as in "Tire Town" (page 280), the town which the inmate had once thought was the "armpit of Ohio," but guesses he still likes it because he always goes back.

Inmates' songs are about the isolation and the separation from the world "outside the walls." They are about the good times, the places, and the people the inmates are cut off from. Many of these songs, although not describing the physical place-- the prison, the cell in which the inmate is locked up-- are still about incarceration because it is the negatives, the things they
are without, the losses, the separations, that are the experience of incarceration for the inmates.

Some inmates do write specifically about the prison, the cell they are in, and what that feels like, day in and day out. In "Hindsight" (page 272), a first-time white inmate asks,

......

Do you know what it's like to wake up in the morn'
And find that nobody's there
Do you know what it's like to turn on the lights
And discover you're still very scared

......

I'm caught up in a world of charades
Where nothin' is important to me,

I only want to be free...

Another black prisoner, after two and a half years of imprisonment, still worries about making it through another "tricky day"—symbolically, to the end of the night. The days are so difficult, they are like nights for this inmate.

End of the Night

End of the night—Another day has gone away
Another day has gone to stay
End of the night—another silly fight
Another day has gone away gone to stay

End of night time and tired
Now I find a most sought after peace of mind
End of another tricky day gone away
What's wrong or right
Who knows the score
Who's been there before
How do you keep one lone fight
So lonely at the end of the night

Day comes and light
Time again to get on up and fight
If we go wrong
I just hope and pray they know
If we pray and we tried and we tried
To make it all right to the end of the night

End of the night
Another day has gone away
Another day has gone away
Another day has gone away

The writer describes "End of the Night" as

... a song about a man in prison who just went
through another tricky day in a max prison ... Lucasville, and at the end of the night (or as I
really should say day) came out all right without a
ticket or a fight ... .

Yet another young black inmate, after a total of almost
fourteen years in prison, chastises himself for being a
"Jailbird."

Jail Bird

Behind bars again got caught stealing from the man
you bad bad boy
Another foolish move-- one more time you lose
what you gonna do Roy
Down and full of doubt, mouth all stuck out,
madder than hell!
Damn, confused in the mind, thinking about the time,
ain't feeling too well ...
(Chorus)
Jail-Bird, you better wake up
Jail-Bird, have you had enough
Jail-Bird, get yourself together
Jail-Bird, you really should know better

Back into the hole, talking 'bout it's cold
feeling sorry for yourself
Dreaming bout the streets, wishing you were free,
shouting out I need some help help help
Waking to the noise of the turnkey's voice
get up go feed your face . . .
looking at the walls, hoping that they fall
so you can try to run away

(Chorus)

You say that you need some help,
so you better take heed to this step,
In order to stay on the streets, you've got to live
by the laws of society

Working everyday for such a small pay
money looking kinda funny
"Is this all I get"
Needing tender love, wanting to be hugged
but can't be with you honey
"I'm lonely Baby"

On the telephone worrying Mom at home
each and everyday
"This time is killing me Mama"
Living by the rules the law laid out for you
to guide you through your stay
"I can't take it no more"

(Chorus)

These songs which deal directly with the day-to-day
experience of incarceration are not directing any blame at
any individual or representative of the criminal justice
system. (Only one piece of music in the 1980s collection
expresses direct protest and complains to any
representative of the criminal justice system. "Something Fishie" (page 274) clearly blames the parole board for making a judgement about someone about whom they knew nothing.) In fact, these songs appear to express not only an acceptance of punishment but also a self-blame for getting into trouble with the law. The "Jail Bird" obviously blames himself for "another foolish move." In fact, this same inmate in another song says he has "had enough of the bad life" and is ready to make a change and live a good life.

Good Life

I've had enough of the bad life,
and the wrong I use to do
I'm giving it up I'm making a change,
I'm gonna try something new
I'm growing older each day,
and it's time I settle down
Somewhere in this great big world,
where happiness can be found
And live a good life . . .
Live a good life . . .

Maybe someone will give me a hand,
and help me get on my feet
Whoever it be I hope in my heart,
that they really consider me
Cause I'm ready to do what's right,
and try my best to be strong
There is no doubt in my mind, I'm ready to take it on
And live a good life . . .
Live a good life . . .
When human beings fail them, when inmates cannot forgive themselves, many of them turn to God for forgiveness and strength to deal with the incarceration experience. As one black inmate says, "When you give your life to Jesus Christ, something happens in your heart, you just don't want to do wrong no more." His song emphasizes the intensity of his belief:

Keep On Burning

Burning inside of me.
It's a fire burning in my heart, (in my heart)
the Holy Spirit has set me apart.
His fire is all over me, (over me)
the inspired word will set you free,
there's a fire.

(Chorus)
There's a fire-- a fire, There's a fire-- a fire.
There's a fire-- a fire, There's a fire-- a fire.
Burning inside of me.

I want to thank Him for redeeming my soul,
    His sacrifice has made me whole.
I know when tried I'll come forth pure as gold,
    keep on burning in my soul,
talking about a fire.

(Chorus)

It's like fire shut-up in my bones,
this fire keeps moving me on,
With His mercy I'll be strong,
    His love keeps burning on,
it's that fire.

(Chorus)
The following black inmate's song "... let's you know you can't trust in man, you must trust in God."

Believe in Jesus

Oooo Je--sus

You say you believe what God's word has to say,
    but you walk around---
    talking loud and saying nothin'
Oooo Je--sus
Oooo Je--sus

All you need is a little bit of faith,
    about the size of a mustard seed,
And it will grow, grow, grow, grow
    but you must believe.
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus

Now Satan your adversary,
    he's out to get you anyway he can,
But you should not worry, cause God's word is true--
    my friend.
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus

When you pray, believe that you received,
    and you shall have it,
No, nothin' can stand in your way,
    all you need is a little faith.
You must have faith, faith, faith in Je--sus
You must have faith, faith, faith in Je--sus

Just keep trusting in Jesus my friend,
    and I know that He'll deliver you through.
He has all power, and He's given that power to you.
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus
You must believe, believe, believe in Je--sus...

Finally, the female inmate who sings to her children when they come to visit her, sings to them of "The Love of Jesus," as a testimony and religious training.
The Love of Jesus

The love of Jesus is greater than all
He lifted my burden
And He's cleansed my soul
Oh, He lives in His Heaven
Full of silver and gold
Where there's many, many riches
Riches untold

The Love of Jesus, it soothes the soul
He's given us water so we'll 'fes' no more
He says, Pick up your cross daily
And follow me home
To live in Heaven
Where you'll never grow old

It is apparent that of all the songs noted so far, only one describes any approval of deviance—the love song by one woman to another woman (and yet it is not overtly expressed in the lyrics.) None of these songs express any approval of the criminal or outlaw life. Most express fairly traditional values that do not differ from the values of the outside, "non-criminal", world. The places and times remembered are not a glorification of the deviant/criminal life that brought the inmates to prison.

What about the drugs and alcohol that are reported to be connected with almost half of the convictions of the incarcerated population? Inmates do write about drugs. Some of them warn against the use of drugs, and others refer to the use of drugs as a normal activity. One

\[2\] Synonym for want or thirst
prisoner wrote about "Cocaine on My Brain" because it was what led up to his incarceration. Another white inmate wrote about his disappointment in a relationship with a woman and as a result turning to drugs.

    I say I want no lovers and I don't need no friends
    I just want to be alone, but I me fooled myself again
    Cause I just picked up some company--
        a needle and a spoon.
    And it looks as though
    I just might be in love again real soon

Yet another song says:

    You may call it do or die;
        in the streets getting high;
    But it's against the law.

Written by a white prisoner, "Uncle Sid" ... is directed as a sort of a head game for dealers of LSD.

(You know, 'try to figure it out.')

    Uncle Sid

We know who cares, you know I'm not afraid of dyin'
She said "Look now honey don't ya walk that way"
Go see Uncle Sid and then we'll take a trip by flyin'
With the ticket on our tongue
    it won't be just another day
Let's play squirrels for awhile,
keep a count and don't eat too much
Put a stake into the ground but don't bury it too deep
Cause when the music's playin loud
while the red lights flash
Ya get jerked up by the neck
and your whole life is outta reach

The first trip you pay for, the next one's on them
When your bill gets paid you want to do it again
Walk softly now cause you know you're in the wrong
When the heat falls again, HELL
A year or two ain't long

This inmate was serving 5-25 years for an LSD offense.
"Uncle Sid" expresses approval of drugs, particularly LSD.
According to the lyrics it is worth paying for the
"trip"-- "A year or two ain't long." However, the
following two songs by a black prisoner warn against the
use of drugs and getting off on the wrong track.

Push-It

You've got problems and I do too
But you keep on walking that line
You been killin' yourself
'cause you're workin' two jobs
And you still ain't got enough time
You bought a new house and two new cars
And your wife's givin' you the blues
Cause you didn't buy her that brand new coat
And those ninty-five dolla' shoes
And now you wanna get up and out
A' just leave it all behind
But you better think twice about it
And just push it outta yo' mind

(Chorus)
Said a push-it (push-it)
A push-it (push-it)
A push-it outta yo' mind
Now times are hard and life is rough
And you can't seem to see the light
The man's on your back and he's kickin you down
But you know he's wrong and your right
Now things so bad that you need a break
Well-- from all the suff'rin' and pain
And your best friend says that he's got the trick
Gonna turn you on to some 'cain
Said you only go around once in life
Gonna hit up all you can find
Butcha better think twice about it
And just push-it outta yo' mind

(Chorus)
All that vengeance baby (push-it)
All that evil too
All that anger baby (push-it)
A it's no good for you (push-it)
Push-it outta yo' mind

The World Is Coming to an End

People are dying, dying everyday,
they either get killed or throw their life away.
People are talking about revelation of man--
why they talk it, if they don't understand?
The world is coming to an end, you see it everyday--
again, again, again. . .

Time is passing, the bird is on the wing,
your life's in the devil's hands
and you have no say.
The elements of the world
is manipulating you to do wrong,
why you do it-- your life is almost gone.
The world is coming to an end, you see it everyday--
again, again, again. . .

Get your life together, you've only got a short time
Please hear my word, I have no reason to lie.
I've been through so many tribulations
that time has been my witness,
Why spend your time in laughter
when my past can set you free.
Listen to my word,
Listen to my word.
According to the author, "The World Is Coming to an End" was written

... to enlighten the young people [about] what they are doing to themselves and future generations. The theme is to redirect the young folk from becoming dead-headed. To give the young generation a picture of what life would be like in twenty years of destructing self via drugs, alcohol etc.

SUMMARY

The themes of the songs inmates write vary, as much as themes of songs written outside the walls. However, maybe what is most significant about the themes of these songs is that they do not portray the media image of the convicted criminal who insists he/she had a right to commit crime. These songs do not extol the criminal life nor do they give any excuses for criminal behavior. They do not present a picture of the convict who complains that he/she is in prison on a "bum rap." They do not portray the inmate who is a political prisoner.

The lyrics of these songs simply express the losses, the negatives, the things which inmates are without because of the condition of incarceration. These songs, unlike Bruce Jackson's prison work songs, do not necessarily paint a picture of "making it in hell." They primarily reveal simply the basic needs and longings of
human beings-- the need to be connected to other human beings, the need to be loved and cared for-- the basic pains of imprisonment which will always be, by definition, the experience of incarceration for inmates.
CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY, ANALYSIS, AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

This study has been conducted in order to understand the day-to-day experiences of incarceration for prisoners. It has been proposed that inmates' perceptions of imprisonment have not changed appreciably over time and that today's prisoners still experience the same basic "pains of imprisonment"—deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy, and personal security (Sykes, 1958)—as their predecessors. Predicating a lack of change, this research has examined the structure, function, and content of songs written and/or sung by inmates from the early 1800s through the 1980s. It is the contention of this work that lyrics of songs represent a fresh and interesting way of understanding the incarceration experiences of inmates from both the traditional plantation prison systems in the South and industrial prisons of the North.
Combining an extensive review of the historical literature with personal interviews from inmates of the 1980s, this study provides the most far-reaching and complete collection of music written and sung by the imprisoned to date. This study goes beyond previous research in the following ways:

(1) It combines traditional folk music, commercially recorded music, and unpublished songs of 1980s prisoners.

(2) It also combines various folklorists' collections of Afro-American prison songs before the 1970s (Lomax, 1939; Seeger, 1951; Oster, 1969; and Jackson (1972).

(3) It includes music of all forms, such as ballads, blues, rockabilly, reggae, country, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues, written by prisoners in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily from northern prisons but including some southern prisons as well.

(4) It encompasses all forms of prison songs written and performed by both black and white inmates, reflecting Anglo- and Afro-American traditions.

(5) It is the first sociological analysis using music to explain the experience of incarceration.
over time.

In order to achieve these goals, various research strategies were used. Considerable time and effort were expended in collecting the historical data consisting of both folk songs and commercially recorded songs. The collection process entailed two separate out-of-state visits, one to the Archives of Folk Song at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and one to the Country Music Foundation Library in Nashville, Tennessee. At least forty hours of research was conducted at each location.

At the Archives of Folk Song, original tapes, reproductions of tapes and cylinders, word-for-word transcriptions, and field notes of the major folklorists' collections from black inmates in southern prisons of the 1920s through the 1960s were examined. Additionally, previously unavailable prison songs collected by Lawrence Gellert in the South during the 1920s and 1930s were made available for this research through Bruce Harrah-Conforth, a folklorist at Indiana University at Bloomington, Indiana. Moreover, numerous publications by folklorists who collected songs of southern black inmates were also reviewed. These combined collections represent incarceration experiences on traditional plantation-type prisons, jails, work camps, and chain gangs, from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South
Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

In addition to the folklorists' collections, commercially recorded songs by convicts and ex-convicts in the tradition of the white country genre were also obtained. A trip to the Country Music Foundation revealed sparse data organized under the category of prison music. However, personal interviews and written communication with such notables as Johnny Cash and David Allan Coe have called attention to numerous sources of both historical and contemporary country music data. Furthermore, interviews with both prison educational specialists and prisoners of the Tennessee prison system provided additional historical and contemporary data for this research.

Finally, personal in-depth interviews and follow-up correspondence conducted with Ohio and Tennessee prisoners, entailing months of work and travel, yielded the data from the 1980s contemporary prison. Over forty inmates from these two prison systems have contributed well over one hundred contemporary songs which have revealed a picture of the 1980s prison experience as expressed through the vehicle of song.

Interviews of the 1980s inmates were divided into the following major areas:
(1) the music, type, and thematic content;
(2) inmate/songwriters' prison and pre-prison experiences relevant to songwriting;
(3) type of prison; and
(4) general demographic information concerning the inmate.

General demographic information included not only age, race, sex, and educational level of the inmate but also the criminal record history in relationship to convictions and total time ever served in prison. As previously noted in Chapter II, this information was collected in order to gain a general picture of the songwriter/inmate of this research. In addition, the general picture suggests that in terms of race, sex, age, and criminal history and convictions, the inmates of this study do not appear to differ much from the national demographics describing the typical inmate in the United States. In regard to the type of prison (i.e., the security classification the inmate was under when the song in question was written), interviews revealed that most inmates of this research were incarcerated in a medium security prison at the time of writing the song. For an understanding of what the lyrics of songs written by inmates have to say about the prison experience, the inmates were asked why they wrote a particular song and what the writing of that song meant
for them. In order to obtain this information, the following questions were routinely asked:

(1) Tell me about this song.

(2) Why did you write this song?
   (2a) Was it for your own pleasure?
   (2b) Was it in order to get it published?

(3) How would you describe the main theme of this particular piece of music?

(4) Please tell me in your own words what the main point of the lyrics is.

Additionally, inmates were asked about pre-prison and/or prison experiences relevant to songwriting in general and particularly to songwriting in prison. The following questions were asked in order to obtain this information:

(1) How many years have you been writing music?

(2) Did you write music before you were incarcerated?

(3) If you only started writing music in prison, what motivated you to start writing?

(4) Was there something about being in prison that helped you to write?

(5) Was there anything that interfered with your writing?

(6) What was that?
The preceding questions were generally used as guides in directing the inmates' answers. Often not all the specific questions were necessary, and a simple "Tell me about your songwriting experiences," "Tell me about this song," and "Please explain in your own words what it is about and why you wrote it" generally yielded all pertinent information needed for this research. It didn't take much probing, if any, to encourage inmates to speak at length about their musical accomplishments. The non-threatening nature of this research resulted in extraordinarily good cooperation. If any problems arose, it was in the difficulty of terminating the interview.

FINDINGS

This study has proposed that inmates' perceptions and experiences of imprisonment have not changed a great deal over time and that today's prisoners still experience the same basic "pains of imprisonment" as their predecessors. However, this research does not provide a clear and unambiguous answer to this question. As previously noted, prison music arises out of two main cultural traditions of the lower socio-economic classes in the United States: Afro-American and Anglo-American. The major findings of this research are related to differences in terms of
style, content, and use of prison songs by these two heritages. Yet there are also some similarities in the musical expressions of both black and white inmates over time, and these similarities suggest that in some senses, from the inmates' point of view, the experiences of incarceration have not changed much over time.

First of all, songs of black American inmates are linked to their African cultural heritage. The song style of black Americans,

\[ \ldots \text{with its overriding antiphony, its group nature, its pervasive functionality, its improvisational character, its strong relationship in performance to dance and bodily movement and expression, remained closer to the musical styles and performances of West Africa, and the Afro-American music of the West Indies and South America than to the musical style of Western Europe} \] (Levine, 1977:6).

The structure of songs written, sung, and used by black inmates up to the 1970s reflects many of these cultural characteristics of their African heritage. Not only are such characteristics overwhelmingly evident in the prison work song, but they are apparent in the blues found in prison as well. This is so because both types of songs developed outside prison and in terms of form were simply transported by the black prisoners into prisons, jails, chain gangs, and work camps. Work songs have been used exclusively by black inmates in prisons. Even though white prisoners were used on the chain gangs and
imprisoned in southern institutions, this study finds no evidence of the work song in the Anglo-American corpus of prison music. The most apparent and striking difference between black and white inmates, then, is the absolute ownership and control of the work song by black inmates. Further, work songs are meant to be sung and used under communal circumstances. As already noted, work songs "... help the inmates to do work" (Jackson, 1972:31). Moreover, they help them work together in teams and on work squads. Such a phenomenon is completely absent among the songs of white inmates in this research. There appears to be no corollary communal expression of music among white inmates.

Furthermore, the communal use of the work song by black inmates relates to a more overriding solidarity and unity evident also in both the style and the thematic content of black inmates' songs. This sense of solidarity is apparent from earliest documentations of the 1920s up to the 1960s. (It is not so obvious in the 1980s collection, but this issue will be discussed later.) First of all, work songs and blues in prison are not created or exclusively owned by any individual inmate. Hundreds of phrases, lines, and verses exist in the black community, and any particular singer often creates his own
song simply by putting together already existing components, with perhaps an added word or a new inflection in the tune in order to suit the personality or the situation-- particularly the type of work situation. But then, these characteristics of black songs are consistent with the elements of folk music. And blues and work songs found in prison are primarily folk songs. Yet the blues has been described as a highly personalized, self-centered music (Garon, 1975:33), which

\[ \ldots \text{signalled the rise of a more } \ldots \text{ individual-oriented ethic among Negroes at the turn of the century.} \ldots \] [However, the] blues with its emphasis on improvisations; its retention of the call and response pattern; its polyrhythmic effects and its method of vocal leaps, and the use of falsetto, was a definite assertion of cultural elements of the traditional communal musical style (of West Africa)" (Levine, 1977:223-224).

Even the solo performance of the blues singer does not separate the singer from the audience who listens to the blues. In fact, just the opposite is the case:

The unique personal level of this presentation \ldots intensifies the appeal of the blues to its audience as a whole; far from weakening the bonds between the singer and his audience, the highly personalized nature of the blues seems only to strengthen them (Garon, 1975:33).

Accordingly, the inmates who sing the blues in prison can be perceived of as representing and strengthening the bonds with their fellow inmates. The blues, in addition to the work song, also illustrates the unity of the black
inmates' community. Furthermore, the lyrical content of songs the convict and ex-convict blues singers perform represent a unity and solidarity among black Americans in general. Commercially recorded ex-convict blues singers such as Charlie Parker, Bill Broonzey, Leadbelly, or Billie Holiday do not sing for themselves.

The blues artist who sang about prisons in the rural "juke" joints, Chicago, and Kansas City clubs, or on the radio or phonograph records was not separate from his or her Black audience, and certainly was not on exhibit to them as a specimen criminal or ex-prisoner. (That is ... a role in which white ex-prisoner artists were and are often cast.) (Franklin, 1982:108).

Even the blues, which has more individualistic characteristics than any other black music before, still maintains ties with the black community in its mode of presentation and in the lyrics, which in fact touch the blues audience and make the singer and audience feel connected and part of the whole. This is not the case with the white convict/ex-convict performer nor with the lyrical content of Anglo-American prisoners' songs. Famous white convicts/ex-convicts set themselves apart from their audiences and present themselves as "specimen criminal" or "ex-convict." Note the previous newspaper headlines calling attention to such as notables as David Allan Coe and Merle Haggard as "Ex-Cons Making It in Country" (Shreveport Journal, 1976) and "It's Not Hard to
Find Singers with Records" (Nashville Banner, 1982). On the other hand, this researcher knows of few commercially famous ex-convict black artists who present themselves in such a way. Only Leadbelly, with the help of the Lomaxes, was billed in such a manner. Most other black performers historically seem to downplay such information about themselves.

Finally, the lyrics of black inmates' songs also reveal unity and solidarity in many thematic senses. Concordant with the major thesis of this research, much of the black inmates' music reflects the pains of imprisonment, the deprivations, the losses, the negatives of prison life. Moreover, black prisoners, much more than white inmates, sing about the injustices and inequities of the criminal justice system in particular and society in general, which sent them to jail, prison, the chain gang, and the work camp.

Many songs by black inmates, then, reflect protest, unlike their white counterparts (excepting the white political prisoners). In fact, contemporary analysts of black music such as Franklin (1982), Garon (1975), Greenway (1971), Harrah-Conforth (1984), Jackson (1972), Levine (1977), and Sidran (1971) all agree that there always were elements of protest in black music even from the very beginning of slavery. Furthermore, Garon and
Sidran both suggest that the structure of black music is by definition protest music.

The dark birth of Afro-American music remains unquestionably oppositional (Garon, 1976:8).

It has been suggested that the social act of music was at all times more than it seemed within the black culture. Further, to the extent the black man was involved with black music, he was involved in the black revolution. Black music was in itself revolutionary, if only because it maintained a non-Western orientation in the realms of perception and communication (Sidran, 1972:14).

It is not surprising, then, that protest is found in the song lyrics of black inmates. It would be more surprising if it were not found. After all, in prison blacks have always been allowed to sing that which is not allowed in ordinary conversation. Also, the conditions of incarceration, particularly in the South, have been ripe for expressions of protest. In this research, protest is significantly absent from white inmates' songs, except for the political prisoners. Moreover, the themes of protest emanate from a collective sense of oppression for black inmates, not the individualistic one of the white inmates. Black inmates appear to sing out of a collective sense of grief, whereas white inmates appear to sing out of individual grief.

Yet the songs of both black and white inmates alike speak to the deprivations occasioned not simply by the
prison experience but by the loss of their loved ones, their family and friends. The condemned convict of the early pre-execution ballad worries about his loved ones—parents, spouse, lover, and children—who are to be left behind. Frankie Silver worries about her child from whom she is separated, Charles Guiteau "leave[s] [his] aged parents in sorrow," and Tom Dula tells his mother "not to weep nor cry." The more contemporary inmate of the "criminal goodnight," who took leave of the world to serve a long prison term, also mourned the loss of loved ones. The "Boston Burglar" describes his "aged father standing at the bar," his "dear old mother a-tearing down her hair," and finally, the girl in Boston to whom he intends to return, if he ever gains his liberty.

In addition, the prisoner of the "Logan County Jail" tells his "true-love" not to cry. Merle Haggard also worries that someone might blame his mother for his mistakes and tells the world,

She tried to raise me right but I refused

(Haggard, 1981:41)

The songs of black inmates also reflect a sense of loss and separation from their loved ones. They long for letters from their mothers, sisters, wives, and girlfriends. Maze Mack sings,
Make a longtime man feel bad
I don't get no letter, I don't hear from home

(Jackson, 1972:78)

In the 1960s in Texas, Jackson (1972:37) collected many songs from one inmate in which a total of eighteen stanzas were about his woman. And in 1984 in Ohio, this researcher collected fifteen songs from one inmate about his woman.

Inmates also miss their children. As reflected in "Little Miss Blue Eyes," some of the men didn't get to see or hold their children in their laps until after they were imprisoned.

Consistent with other recent research findings, one of the primary themes in the lyrics of songs written and sung by black and white inmates over time reveals that the "pains of imprisonment" have not been alleviated over two hundred years of changes in American prisons (Goodstein and Hepburn, 1985; Johnson, 1987). One of the most painful aspects of imprisonment reflected in these data, as well as other recent research findings, is being unable to see friends and relatives on the outside (Flanagan, 1980; Hopper, 1985).

In comparison to the solidarity reflected in songs of the black prisoner, songs of white inmates illustrate a Protestant individualistic cultural heritage, not only in
the creation of the song but also in its use and thematic content. The songs of white inmates are created and sung by individual inmates alone, and the functions of the white inmates' songs appear to serve individual functions expressed in isolation from others. Moreover, white inmates write songs reflecting loneliness, powerlessness, and estrangement.

Finally, the thematic content of white inmates' songs remains consistent over time with the major elements of the earliest pre-execution ballads. The condemned convicts awaiting execution created a ballad which was multi-thematic, including elements which appear over and over again in white inmates' songs up to the 1980s. As already noted, the early ballads are generally confessions. The lyrics describe the criminal act, most often a murder of a lover or spouse (more often the male killing the female); the circumstances leading up to the act (men kill women because the women get pregnant, because the women won't marry them, because the men don't want to marry the women, or because of jealousy); the convict worrying about the family members who will be left behind to mourn and bear the shame, and finally the convict accepting the just punishment for the horrendous act committed. These ballads also often contain a moral, the moral in this case being: "Don't make the same
mistake I did." Finally, the criminal blames him/herself as an individual. Conviction and imminent execution have resulted from individual mistakes.

In previous chapters describing the Anglo-American music and the 1980s songs, this individualistic strain incorporating these various elements has been pointed out. Yet as songs written by convicts and ex-convicts began to be shaped by the commercialized recording industry, not all elements appeared together in any one song. Particularly in the case of 1970s country music singers such as Haggard, Coe, and Sherley, it takes more than one song in their collection to illustrate all these elements. And necessarily so, since the technology of the recording industry has significantly shortened the length of the tune. Most commercially recorded songs of the present day do not run much more than three minutes in length. Compare the typical commercial recording of three or four verses and a chorus repeated perhaps three times to the nineteen verses of "McAfee's Confession" in Chapter V. In addition, through the data of the 1980s the themes remain consistent. The songs of white inmates appear to express not only Protestant individualism but also a cry of loneliness, deprivation, and isolation. These cries come from an individual isolated grief. The white inmate of
1980, like the inmate of the early 1800s, stands alone. In this case, the experiences of incarceration have not changed much over time.

The major difference between the music of both black and white inmates is that of solidarity versus individualism, respectively. The music of 1980s prisoners continues this difference in regards to the styles or types of songs. In general, the types are consistent with the inmates' cultural heritage. Black inmates do not report country songs. There are no Charlie Prides within the prisons where this research was conducted. Also, white inmates write few rhythm and blues, reggae, blues, soul, or jazz tunes. Only white inmates report rock and roll tunes, whereas only black inmates report writing rhythm and blues. Only one white inmate reports a song categorized as gospel. On the other hand, many black inmates report gospel tunes, and the tunes are not songs that one would likely hear in any white church. Not only are the tunes part of the black cultural tradition, but also some of the words in the gospel tunes are part of the dialect of the black religious tradition. (See "Love of Jesus" on page 308 and the explanation of "fes.")

Some of the black male songwriters who played their songs during the interview sang in a falsetto. None of the white inmates used such a style. On the other hand,
the southern white inmate in his fifties used a high-pitched nasal tone reminiscent of the Anglo-American folk ballad.

Finally, most of the contemporary tunes sound like songs which one would hear on any commercial radio station. Stylistically, the tradition of the folk song as such no longer exists in the contemporary prison of the 1980s, according to this research. Yet differences between black and white inmates' musical expressions are still maintained.

However, there is one important exception to these overriding differences. As a cursory review of the 1980s chapter illustrates, the content of the lyrics are hardly distinguishable from one another, in terms of a solidarity versus individualistic theme. Most songs of both black and white inmates alike lyrically represent an individualistic theme. The characteristic solidarity and communalism of black inmates is no longer evident in the lyrics of their songs. The black inmate who writes about the "End of the Night"-- actually the end of "another tricky day in a max prison"-- seems to be referring to getting through a day on his own. There is no reference to any group solidarity or communalism that makes his days in prison bearable. He wants to know how "you keep one
lone fight, so lonely at the end of the night."

Another black inmate who writes "Jail Bird" chastises himself for being a "bad, bad boy" and tells himself:

Jailbird, get yourself together
Jailbird, you really should know better

In order to stay on the streets, you've got to live by the laws of society

Furthermore, gospel songs written by black inmates of the 1980s do not reveal a sense of solidarity or unity either. Neither the lyrics nor the motivations for writing the songs reported by inmates reveal any evidence of the communal characteristics which had historically typified black prisoners' music in the United States. In fact, the opposite is true. Gospel songs also reflect centuries of exposure to the Anglo-American Protestantism of the United States, resulting in individualistic elements which had formerly characterized white inmates' songs only. "When you give your life to Jesus Christ, something happens in your heart; you just don't want to do wrong no more," reports one inmate.

I want to thank Him for redeeming my soul

I know when tried I'll come forth pure as gold

He says pick up your cross daily and follow me home
The above lyrics point first to Jesus Christ, the individual Saviour, not God the Father who led the black slaves across the Jordan. In addition, the inmate's explanation of giving his life to Jesus Christ portrays the black inmates' movement towards and acceptance of the Anglo-American Protestant image of God. Such a picture portrays the image of the individual standing alone before God-- not the group, not the whole race of blacks who would be taken home by God the Father.

In these respects, the songs of the 1980s black inmates appear to be little different than their white counterparts. As evidenced in the songs of this research, the prisons of the 1980s do not indicate such distinct differentiation between black and white prisoners as had the earlier prison songs of these two groups. This study indicates a movement of black inmates, at least in the expression of song, towards an identification with American individualism.

In sum, this study reveals major differences between black and white inmates' musical expressions over time. The most striking difference is the use of the work song by black inmates. However, within each heritage there are consistent themes which suggest a lack of change in the prisoners' day-to-day perception of incarceration. Up to
the 1980s data, songs and musical forms indicate a persistent element of solidarity and also protest among black inmates. Emanating from their minority status in the United States, black inmates' cultural expressions resoundingly illustrate a unified sense of oppression and protest about their situation. On the other hand, white inmates' songs reveal a Protestant individualization characteristic up into the 1980s collection. For white inmates over time, then, incarceration as reflected in song presents an isolated individual who has made a mistake, not because of any minority status but because of his own individual choice. The white inmates then present themselves as estranged individuals who are different from the rest of society and who have alienated themselves through their own individual rational choices, through their own individual failings and weaknesses.

Finally, however, the songs of both black and white inmates do reveal a concern with the loss of loved ones. Both groups' songs contain constant themes over time that indicate the inmates' basic and most painful experiences of imprisonment— the inability to see and stay in contact with relatives and friends. In this sense, then, the experience of incarceration has not changed a great deal for both black and white inmates over time. Not only change and lack of change are evident in this analysis of
prison music, but the issue of differences between black and white inmates' musical expressions has also been explored.

Importation v. Deprivation

Another question was initially raised in this research: How do the songs of prisoners support the respective merits of the importation or deprivation models of imprisonment?

An analysis of the songs written and/or sung by inmates over time suggests that it is neither model alone which the music supports but a combination of both. It has been illustrated that there are forms or types of music favored and brought into the prison by the inmates. The black prisoners have brought both the work song and the blues into prison with them. As already noted, these two styles of music maintain linkages to their West African cultural heritage. Even the 1980s black inmates maintain such linkages in the use of the falsetto. Yet if one recalls the content of most of the black music discussed in this work, the lyrics, on the other hand, resoundingly reflect the inmates' observations and reactions--often protest--to the specific conditions of imprisonment, i.e. the hot sun that poured down on them
while they worked, the captains who whipped them, and the
lice that crawled all over them in jails and prisons.

The white inmates also maintain linkages to their
cultural heritage, both in terms of the style of music and
the thematic content of individualism. Yet, as already
illustrated, many of the themes of the lyrics created
"inside the walls" deal with the inmates' reactions to and
descriptions of the incarceration experience.

Referring back to the "criminal goodnights" and the
pre-execution ballads, the content or lyrics of these
particular ballads was unique to the condemned prisoner's
condition. However, the form or structure of the ballad
is, in fact, a phenomenon which was part of the Anglo-
Saxon cultural tradition which the earliest settlers
brought to the United States.

The musical forms of the 1980s collection are also
types of songs which are as much part of the free-world
community as they are of the prison community. It is only
the specific lyrics that emerge from the prison
conditions, not the particular structure or form. Whether
the song is country, blues, reggae, or soul, these types
of music are in fact brought into the prison community as
part and parcel of the cultural baggage which the inmates
carry with them. In fact, in about half of the cases in
the contemporary collection, songwriting is a skill which
the inmate brings with him. Music for most inmates then has always played a part in their adaptation to life, not just prison life. The walls of the prison exist, and the rules, regulations, and some of the mortification processes are still real (although some researchers claim that it is not the prison authorities who intentionally perpetuate such processes. Rather today it is other inmates who do so) (Johnson, 1987). Yet an analysis of the particular styles and types of music which inmates use show evidence that cultural traditions or some elements of those traditions have always transcended the "walls" of the prison.

Thus, prison music does not indicate that one prevailing hypothesis of prison culture is better than the other in explaining the experience of incarceration. Rather, it is a combination of both which is best reflected by this form of cultural expression.

ANALYSIS

Black Inmate Subculture Until the 1960s

As already noted, the primary findings of this research are in the differences between black and white prisoners' musical expressions in the earlier periods of
incarceration. These differences are most striking in the use and creation of the work song by black inmates. The Afro-American work song is perhaps one of the most unique cultural expressions of black Americans, both within and without the "walls" of the prison. However, for purposes of this research, it is primarily in relationship to the structure and function of the work song that a glimpse of the southern black inmate subculture is obtained.\(^1\) Since the work song was predominantly used in the South on the chain gangs, in the work camps, and in the fields of the plantation prisons, this reconstructionist attempt is necessarily restricted to those conditions and geographical locations. It is also restricted to the 1960s and before, since the use of the work song is practically nonexistent in the 1980s. Accordingly, this exploration is not meant to describe the black inmate subculture in either northern industrial-type prisons or contemporary prisons of the South.

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\(^1\) This description of the black inmate subculture is based primarily on Bruce Jackson's work on Afro-American work songs from the Texas prisons (1972). However, since Jackson's emphasis is a detailed account of the folk songs, it does not portray the organization of black inmates in a hierarchial structure as this researcher has done.
Leo Carroll (1974), who was the first to study the separate and distinctive subculture of black inmates, notes three major characteristics of that subculture. First of all, black inmates portray a stronger sense of identity with their fellow black prisoners than do white inmates. Second, this sense of solidarity is a characteristic which the inmates bring into the prison with them as a result of the Civil Rights movement and the concomitant "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Militant" movements of the 1960s and 1970s free world black community. Finally, black leaders are more integrated with their followers than are white inmates, and black inmate leaders rule by wit, not by brawn.

In the past, the use of the work song by southern black inmates indicated the same sense of solidarity among black inmates. As already noted, it was the black prisoner who imported the tradition of the work song from the cotton fields into the southern prison. There is no evidence that the white or Chicano inmates have ever created or sung work songs. In addition, work songs are communal songs. According to Jackson (1972:30-31), "... the singing is completely noncompetitive; it is a voluntary association... It is just everyone trying to make it together."
Functions of Work Songs

In order to gain as complete an understanding of the black inmate subculture as possible (although sparse documentation exists), Bruce Jackson's discussion of the functions of work songs will be reviewed again here. As previously noted, the use of work songs serves three major functions: (1) they supply a rhythm for work; (2) they help pass the time; and (3) they serve as a vehicle for expressing tension, frustration, and anger. In this third function, they serve as a vehicle for protest. An additional function which Jackson (1972:30) is not quite sure of is the co-optation of the work.

The songs change the nature of the work into the workers' framework rather than the guards'. By incorporating the work with their song, by, in effect, co-opting something they are forced to do anyway, they make it theirs in a way it otherwise is not (Jackson, 1972:30; emphasis in original work).

In relationship to supplying a rhythm for work, the work songs not only serve an efficiency function in that everyone works at the same pace, but they also serve a survival function. When a team of inmates is cutting down a tree (crosscutting), the rhythm of the song regulates the swing and strike of the ax and prevents the unregulated swing that could possibly cut a fellow inmate's hand or leg (Jackson, 1972:31-32). The rhythm
also serves an older additional survival function.

You take twenty-five years ago, anyone couldn't make it. It was hard days. . . . You get worked to death or beat to death. That's why we sung so many of these songs. We would work together and help ourselves as well as help out our fellow man. Try to keep the officials we was workin' under pacified and we'd make it possible to make a day (Jackson, 1972:1-2).

The inmates who worked too slowly were the ones who were singled out for the beatings. "By singing together and keeping the strokes together while cutting logs or working with hoes, none could be singled out for being too slow so no one could be punished simply because he was weaker than his fellows" (Jackson, 1972:30).

Work songs also create a diversion from the drudgery and boredom of the work. Inmates describe how and why the work song helps pass the time.

I can do a whole lot more work workin' by time than I can workin' loose. . . . When I sing, picking cotton, before I know anything I be three blocks ahead of the squad. Just picking along.

But if there's nobody saying nothing, then everybody look like they mad or crazy or something and I'll get stuck and forget what I'm doing.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

And when a man get to singing he doesn't got time to think about his problems or the work (Jackson, 1972:18-19).

Actually, we get more work done when there's singing than when we're silent. Because that leads into arguments and confusion if a man hasn't anything to occupy his mind. If his mind is occupied he's steady working in union (Jackson, 1972:26).
Finally, work songs alleviate tension, frustration, and anger in that the inmates sing about things that they are not permitted to say. "There is a long tradition in the South of the black man being permitted to sing things he is not permitted to say. . . . it is as if sung words were not real" (Jackson, 1972:30). For example, inmates sing songs that equate the Captain with the devil:

Tell me who is that devil . . .
It was Captain Joe Harper . . .
He's the devil in the bottom . . .

(Jackson, 1972:267)

Captain Joe Harper was a real captain in the Texas Department of Corrections at the time of Jackson's research.

In another case, a song suggests that Black Betty's crazy baby was sired by Jack O' Diamonds, a captain on Central Farm back in the late 1940s who had a reputation for being cold-blooded (Jackson, 1972:193). When an inmate tried to escape, if Jack O' Diamonds found him, he would say, "' . . . oh, you won't see your mama no more' and shoot the inmate right between the eyes" (Jackson, 1972:13).

Oh Black a Betty's got a baby . . .
A-well he crazy like his daddy . . .
Tell me who was his daddy . . .
Oh if I tell you don't tell it, let your . . .
A Jack O' Diamonds was his daddy, let your . . .

(Jackson, 1972:195)

In sum, the use of the work song enabled black inmates to help keep themselves and other inmates from being beaten and abused. It also helped them stay alive. In addition, the work song enabled them to alleviate their frustrations and anger by singing about the intolerable conditions under which they had to live. In this sense, the lyrics of the work song served as a vehicle of protest. Accordingly, the functions of the work song indicate a collective solidarity of the black inmate in the South long before Carroll noted this phenomenon among black inmates in the early 1970s.

Hierarchy of Inmate Roles:
Song Leader, Backgrounders, and Pull-Dos

The work song indicates not only solidarity among black inmates, but also the stratification system of the black inmates within the institution. Work songs require a song leader. The song leader does not necessarily have to be such a good singer as one who, with the use of the song, will help the inmates do the work. Good leaders, according to Jackson (1972:34) have . . . the ability to keep a steady meter going (one paced so that the men can work to it without being
overworked, yet fast enough so that the bosses won't get upset that everyone isn't doing enough), and the ability to be heard over the sounds of brushfires, movement, wind in the branches and other miscellaneous sounds that one almost never notices but which really exist as a curtain or wall of sound in a forest.

The two required qualities of song leader, then, are regularity and volume. Without them, the men will not permit an inmate to sing lead. Good leaders are also good workers, because it appears that it is only the especially strong leaders that have enough wind left from the work to maintain a good volume. The good song leader, then, who helps the men keep pace and makes the time go by, is in fact the inmate with the highest status among inmates in the agricultural prison community that uses the work song (Jackson, 1972:34).

However, the leader does not function alone. In order to be efficient, he needs a group behind him (called backgrounders by some) that can sing and work together as well as he can lead (Jackson, 1972:34). The good song leader as the strongest worker is usually the lead hoe in Number One Hoe Squad-- the first man in the first squad (Jackson, 1972:35). According to Jackson, there is a kind of pride in being in Number One Hoe even though this squad does more work than the other squads. One wonders why the inmates take pride in doing more work than any of the other inmates for the "Man." One of the inmates Jackson
interviewed suggested that sometimes an inmate might want to kill the lead singer for pushing them so hard, but they weren't likely to do so because of the fear of retaliation.

However, another inmate argued with him and claimed that working together to do your best becomes a challenge. Inmates on Number One Hoe Squad develop a team spirit that both helps them do the work and develops pride within themselves for being the best (Jackson, 1972:35).

Furthermore, the administration also recognizes the worth of the Number One Hoe Squad with positive sanctions, according to Texas inmates of the 1960s:

... the higher squads that these guys are in, they get other breaks. Like maybe they got some trucks to load or something while the rest of them are working, well they go unload the trucks. You get some compensations (Jackson, 1972:35).

The inmates not only get compensations from the administration but also take pride in themselves and are respected by other inmates because they can do better than most other inmates on the farm.

After a while it becomes a challenge. You kinda get a little team spirit more or less, you like to be in One Hoe. I mean you work harder and faster, but you're better than those pull-dos. You know, just like a guy that can drink more whiskey than somebody else. It's ridiculous, but it's that way. And after you get broke in, it still can wear you down, but it's not the same. It's not impossible any more (Jackson, 1972:35).
In this manner, then, the inmates take control of the work that they are required to do. They partially co-opt it in pushing themselves not only to be the best they can be but also to be better than the others. Thus the hierarchy develops around the use of the work and the work song. The lead singer of the Number One Hoe Squad then becomes the inmate with the highest status among the inmates. Because of that respect from the inmates and the ability he has to keep the men producing at top speed, he also earns respect from the administration. The lead singer on the squads, then, may also be seen as a mediator between the inmates and the guards. He helps the men survive, and at the same time keeps the peace by helping them to meet the quotas set out by the authorities. Not only the lead but also the men on Number One Hoe Squad have a high status among the inmates because they are the best workers. On the other hand, the inmate who is least respected on the work squads is the pull-do. Note in the above quote that the inmate stated that working harder and faster makes one better than those pull-dos. A pull-do is an incompetent worker, someone who shirks or makes too many mistakes, someone who can't pull his own weight in a squad. One of the earlier survival functions of the work song was to keep everyone working together so that no one could be singled out and beaten. When there was a pull-do
on the squad, it was likely that not only would he be singled out and beaten but also that the other inmates who had to pick up the slack were likely to be overworked and consequently singled out and beaten. The inmates on the work squads did not respect the man who did not keep up. It was likely to be not only his skin but theirs too that felt the sting of the whip. Even though the pull-do does not put the inmates in danger of such cruel punishments anymore, he is still not respected by other prisoners.

According to Jackson's interpretation, the hierarchy is not such that the lead singer is in charge all the time, however. He is in charge because he knows how and when to work his men hard. The inmates do not always wait for the song leader to notice that they are getting tired. When they want to slow down, they call:

"Come on, you all, let's rock a while," and they get together, you know, and that's the way they fool the boss. They come down with their axe and then they work it like it's stuck, they be resting, see. Then they take it, carry it out, hang it, carry it over their head real high; they resting. And they drop. But they ain't hitting as hard as they would if they're working. . . . if they rocking they got their time and they going slower, they draw it way back and just drop it. They ain't doin' much. They rocking. That's called "Rocking along easy" (Jackson, 1972:19).

The song leader's status seems to be derived from both his ability to keep the men working hard, which made the administration happy, and, on the other hand, from his
ability to help the men pass the time and physically survive the long, hard work days from sun-up to sun-down, which in turn kept the inmates relatively content. Finally, although the black inmate leaders in Carroll's research ruled by wit rather than by brawn, the song leader's power is derived ultimately from his physical strength and ability to combine singing and working. However, it appears that this physical strength was not always used in a negative, destructive sense against other inmates but more often in combination with wit, which enabled the song leader and work squad to con the administration.

Jackson's portrayal of the inmates who use the work song illustrates an hierarchial organization of the black inmates before the 1970s. At the top were the song leaders of Number One Hoe Squads, then the workers and group singers of the Numbr One Hoe Squad, and finally the pull-dos.

Comparing this informal organization of black inmates, one might equate the song leader of the work song with Irwin's (1980) "right guy" of the Big House. Within the prison plantation system organized around agricultural work, it is the number one hoe on the Number One Hoe Squad who is trusted, respected, and accepted by other inmates. Furthermore, the man in number one hoe position is
respected not only because he is cool and tough as Irwin's right guy (1980:13), but also because he helps the other inmates "make it" during the long work days. Unlike Clemmer's "elites," the work song leaders do not appear to set themselves apart from their men and only interact with one another. Here, too, up to the 1970s, Jackson's picture of the work song leader is closer to the picture of Carroll's black inmate leaders. As Carroll portrayed the black inmate subculture, black inmate leaders were more integrated with their followers than the white inmates. And Jackson's picture of the inmate song leader/number one hoe illustrates the black leader who is integrated with his followers through voluntary cooperation in the use of the work song. The work squad--lead singer and "backgrounders"--are all just making it together.

Perhaps too, as this researcher's later criticism and analysis of Jackson's work indicates, the lead singer can also be equated with Sykes' portrayal of the "Real Man." Sykes describes the "Real Man" as someone who "plays it cool," "can take it," and "pulls his own time" (1958:102). In Sykes' description,

The real man is a prisoner who "pulls his own time" in the phrasing of the inmate population and he confronts his captors with neither subservience nor aggression. Somewhat aloof, seldom complaining, he
embodies the inmates' version of decorum. And if the real man's efforts to maintain his integrity in the face of privation have an important psychological utility--for the real man regains his autonomy, in a sense, by denying the custodians' power to strip him of his ability to control himself--it is also true that his role is of vital functional significance for the social system of imprisoned criminals. In the emphasis on endurance with dignity, the inmates have robbed the rebel of their support; it is the man who can stop himself from striking back at the custodians that wins their admiration and thus their image of the hero functions wittingly or unwittingly to maintain the status quo.

Unlike Sykes' "real man," Jackson does not portray the song leader as someone who "does his own time." Rather, the song leader is one who helps the group "do time." Song leaders and backgrounders together "do group time." Yet similar to Sykes' analysis, the prisoner song leader does function to maintain the status quo for the authorities. If the inmates have an especially good and strong song leader, they not only stay out of arguments and fights with one another, they are also productive. Thus the use of the work song becomes a vehicle of social control.

In relationship to the organization of the work song, a glimpse of the black inmate subculture before the 1960s is obtained. This subculture also reveals some evidence of solidarity among black inmates similar to Leo Carroll's research of the early 1970s. This picture of the black inmate subculture also suggests that Carroll's
observations of black solidarity may not only have been a result of the "Black Militant" and "Black is Beautiful" movements of the 1960s, but in fact this solidarity also existed within the black inmate subculture of the past.

Jackson portrays the black inmate in a very positive sense. His research, based on interviews with old-time prisoners, also projects his interpretation of communalism and cooperation among black inmates into the past, prior to the 1960s conditions which he observed. This researcher wonders, however, if Jackson's interpretations can be projected into the past.

There is some sparse evidence which suggests that the cooperation among black inmates who used the work song was not necessarily the ordinary state of affairs. The use of the work song was not always a non-competitive activity. Evidence also exists that suggests the work song and the song leader provided social control for actions which served the administration.

Huddie Leadbetter, or "Leadbelly" as he was more commonly known, reports an incident when he was a song leader-- lead hoe in the Number One Hoe Squad at Shaw Farm in Texas during the 1930s.

Sometimes one o' dem niggers would come up an' try to rush me. I'd look at de boss an' he'd say, 'Take 'em away, ol' Walter.' Man, then I'd fly on dat row, get to de en', whirl' aroun', an' be gone ag'in. Man, I'd leave dem niggers so far behin' till I couldn'
hardly see 'em.

Den de boss would holler, 'Let 'em down, ol' Walter.' An' I'd slack down till they got nearly up to me, an' then-- 'Take 'em away, ol' nigger.' I'd say, 'Yow, I'm gone.' Then I'd walk off an' leave 'em ag'in. Man, I'd have 'em pantin' all day long, never would let 'em down. Niggers be fallin' out all over de fiel', an' I'd be feelin' jes' right. Den dey'd be sorry for tryin' to tes' me, an' they'd say, 'Please, Walter, you gonna kill us all. Please, Walter, give us a rest. We won' do it no mo'. I'd tell 'em, 'I'm gonna learn you so good you won' do it no second time. You hadn' oughta been so big de fus' time.' Den I'd fly on away, holl'in' an' singin', an' carry 'em dat way till sundown (Lomax and Lomax, 1936:17-18).

This description by Leadbelly indicates that the song leader and workers did not always cooperate in a voluntary manner. In fact, the workers in this case tried to rush their leader. It is not clear why they did so. One can only speculate that they did not like Leadbelly for some reason. Perhaps he was working them too fast. However, he turned on them and worked them so fast that they begged for mercy: "Please, Walter, you gonna kill us all. Please, Walter, give us a rest."

In this portrayal of the work situation, the prisoners did not work hard because they were worried about repercussions from the guards. They were pushed to work hard by one of their own fellow inmates, with the

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2 Walter Boyd was the name Leadbelly used and was convicted under during this particular prison term in Texas (Lomax and Lomax, 1936:2).
approval of the "man" (guard). Leadbelly's account then portrays a song leader who can be vindictive and drive the inmate workers to exhaustion.

The song leader in Leadbelly's examples derives his status from approval by the administration. Leadbelly's reference to himself as the "best white man's nigger" (Lomax and Lomax, 1936:19) the prison ever had also indicates that the above incident may not have been an uncommon one. Furthermore, such a reference to himself suggests that Leadbelly perceived himself as working for the administration rather than in voluntary cooperation with the inmates on the work squad.

Furthermore, although Jackson interprets the use of the work song as a co-optation of the work by the inmates, the use of the work song can be perceived of as a social control mechanism of the administration. When blacks first arrived in this country, certain types of songs and musical instruments were forbidden on the plantations. But eventually plantation owners and overseers realized that communal singing not only was an integral part of the culture but also kept up the work production. Here, too, at Shaw Farm in Texas in the 1930s, the use of the song kept up work productivity, which served prison administrators' concerns. Even in the 1960s, Jackson's
research also illustrates that the use of the work song prevented arguments among the black inmates, thus preventing the escalation of petty arguments and griping into more serious violent episodes. Work songs, under the direction of certain song leaders under particular conditions, can then serve a social control function.

Although Levine (1977:210) suggests that Leadbelly's behavior was relatively isolated behavior by song leaders and not the norm, one wonders if such incidents were in fact commonplace during the earlier part of this century. There is overwhelming evidence that black and white inmates could be as brutal as civilian employees when they were given power and control over other inmates in the form of the trustee and building tender systems. There is some evidence also that when a minority group gains power, it often simply replaces the former overlords as oppressors. Finally, it is a well-known sociological phenomenon that when a minority achieves a position within the dominant group, that individual often takes on the extreme stereotypical behaviors of the dominant group. It would not be unlikely, then, that some of the song leaders might become corrupted by their status and power over the other inmates. Yet Jackson's interpretation may not be an unrealistic one for the inmates of the Texas system in the
1960s. In fact, the differences in interpretation of the role of the song leader may be dependent upon the different historical periods in prisons. Leadbelly was imprisoned in the 1930s, and Bruce Jackson conducted his research in the 1960s. Perhaps the real story lies somewhere between these two different interpretations, and only further research can clarify these questions.

Decline of Prison Music

One more observation needs to be made about this research. The choice of music as data presupposes that music reflects, in some way, the incarceration experience. It also presupposes that there is a certain amount of data (inmates' songs) which can add to our knowledge of the prisoners' world. It has been noted that inmates' songs do not always reflect only the incarceration experience, but, in fact, music created in the prison is the result of influences both inside and outside the "walls." Furthermore, in relation to a certain amount of data, the number of songs found in the prisons of the 1980s is small in comparison to the total number of inmates in respective prisons. Approximately forty inmates contributed one hundred songs for the contemporary collection, and those forty inmates represent five different prisons with average populations of over one thousand inmates per
prison. Even though no comparison numbers exist for the early folklore collections from prisons, this researcher's best guess is that the various collections total in the thousands. One must also remember that folk songs were not used and sung by just one inmate but by many inmates. Songs in the contemporary collections are generally created and sung by single individual inmates. The small number of contemporary inmate/songwriters, then, indicates that the use of music as a primary form of cultural expression by inmates is definitely declining. It is apparent that the folk songs really are disappearing now. The general decline and virtual disappearance of the work song has already been documented. Furthermore, the 1980s prisoners only contributed a couple of songs out of one hundred that might be classified as folk songs. The large body of prison folk songs found even as late as the 1960s by Bruce Jackson (1972) in Texas and Harry Oster (1969) at Angola in Louisiana does not appear in the 1980s collection of this study. So it appears that not only work songs but also folk songs in general are disappearing from the prison community. Such a decline in folk song is not so surprising, however. Folk songs are also disappearing outside "the walls." Recently, this author accompanied a folklorist to interview one of the few older
black men in the area who still remembered the words to many of the old folk songs from the early part of this century. Even in a relatively rural section of north Louisiana, it seems that not only are the old folk songs disappearing but the whole tradition of folk song is also slowly disappearing. And like the inmates in the Texas prisons of the 1960s, few young black men in rural Louisiana seem interested in carrying on the old traditions.

Moreover, this research indicates that the creation and performance of any kind of music in prison appears to be on the decline. Perhaps the changing reforms during the last two decades have eliminated the need for music to be used as a primary form of cultural expression by the inmate. H. Bruce Franklin's *Prison Literature in America* (1982) used folk songs from the prisons as examples of the earliest literature of prisons. But his contemporary data is composed of primarily poetry and novels written by inmates.

A trip to any prison of the 1980s gives more indication as to why the individual or group creation and use of music has declined. In a general sense, prisons have been opened to the outside community as a result of the reforms of the past two decades. One of the changes that has accompanied these reforms is the availability of
commercial music played and performed on radio, tapes, and television. Many prisons allow inmates to have their own personal radios, tape recorders, and televisions. In the late 1970s, Greenhave, a maximum security prison in New York State, equipped all its cells with a "... three channel outlet for earphones. (Music, news and sports selected by the prison's radio room are played on two channels, television sound tracks on the third... )" (Sheehan, 1978:33). Furthermore, on a recent visit to St. Gabriel, the women's prison in Louisiana, many inmates were seen in the yard and in the cells with their own personal radio/tape players. In fact, different groups in the yard congregated around other inmates with radios. At one point, a group of women was dancing to a song being played on the commercial radio station.

Music is part of the 1980s prison community, but it is more likely to be commercial music heard on the local radio station than that created by the inmates.

The decline of barriers to the outside world, including access to commercial music, also helps explain both the decline of folk music and other individual musical creations. Inmates of today do not have to create music to hear it or play it. It is as readily available to them on the radio, tapes, or television as it is to
people in the free world.

Finally, prisons of the 1980s are integrated. Black and white inmates work together, cell together, and eat together. Perhaps the decline of the folk song can also be partially accounted for by integration. (Inmates do self-segregate, but before integration it was often the case that black and white inmates never even saw one another for the duration of their sentences. In fact, that is one reason why folklorists went to southern prisons to collect black folk songs. They believed that the folk songs collected from black prisoners would be a pure form of folk song unadulterated by contact with white people.) With integration, however, the critical mass of distinct, separate cultures was broken down. No longer does a separate cultural base exist within the prison, at least not one that produces song. In this area also, further research is recommended.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, an analysis of prison music over time reveals many interesting and varied findings. The major findings of this work are related to differences in terms of style, content, and use of prison songs by the two major cultural traditions in prisons: Anglo-American and Afro-American.
The most striking difference is in the communal use of the work song. As revealed in this study, only black inmates have used the work songs. There appears to be no corollary communal expression of music among white inmates. One more significant finding evolves from the use of the work song, however. It is in relationship to the work song that a glimmer of the black inmate subculture up to the 1970s is obtained. This informal organization of black inmates portrays a general picture of solidarity and cooperation, with some possible exceptions. Furthermore, the communal use of the work song by black inmates relates to an overriding solidarity and unity which characterizes black inmates' songs over time. On the other hand, songs of white inmates are characterized by individualistic qualities and portray the white inmate as a lone, solitary individual alienated from society, others, and himself. The songs of white inmates illustrate estranged and lonely inmates crying out in individual grief, whereas the black inmates cry out in collective grief.

However, the content of songs by black inmates of the 1980s appears to be more similar to the content of white inmates' songs than ever before. What accounts for the apparent increase of individualistic characteristics in black inmates' songs is not known and can only be
speculated. It might be something unique about the black inmate songwriters who contributed to this research, or perhaps black inmates, like their free counterparts, are becoming more acculturated. This increasing acculturation and acceptance of the Anglo-American individualism may in turn be accounted for by the integration of inmates as a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It is also known that inmates do self-segregate still in prisons, and their self-segregation is often based on alliances with and membership in racial gangs and organizations. Perhaps this relatively legitimate association with groups such as the Black Muslims allows the unity and solidarity of black inmates to be expressed more overtly than ever before, and the need for such expressions in the form of music are no longer necessary. However, the resolution of such speculations requires further research.

Finally, this work indicates that music as a major form of cultural expression is declining in the inmate community. (Speculations have already been raised concerning this finding.) Again, further research needs to be conducted in this area.

There are differences and similarities in black and white inmates' songs over time. Yet even with such
extreme and consistent differences, both black and white inmates' songs reveal the same "pains of imprisonment." The major pain of imprisonment which they express over time is the anguish and loss experienced as a result of the separation from their loved ones, both family and friends. In this sense, then, from the perception of both black and white inmates, prisons have not changed a great deal over time.
Let me tell you a little bit about the research, and then I'll answer any questions you have before we start.

This is a study about prison/jail music and those songwriters who have written this music while incarcerated. It is a study of experiences of people who have been imprisoned in the United States as reflected through their music. One of the intentions of the study is to understand this experience from the prisoners' point of view. In other words, in this study you are the expert because you are the only person who can tell me how you felt—what you did—and why you felt or behaved in certain ways. You are the only one who can tell me why you chose to express yourself through writing music and what the conditions were in the prison which may have encouraged you in this activity.

One final aspect I'll be concerned with are the problems you've had to deal with throughout your prison experience and after. I am particularly interested in those problems which had an impact on your writing.

These are the objectives of the research, but my major objective for the interviews is to make them as comfortable as possible for the inmates who participate. Therefore, if there is a question you would prefer not to
answer or an experience you would rather not describe, please feel free to tell me so. And at any point during the interview, if you feel that you'd like to stop, please let me know and we'll stop.

All the information you give me will be held in strict confidence. I will never use your name or the name of anyone you mention in the interview that is not already public knowledge in any documents or in any conversations with other people. There will be only one list of the names of inmates who participate in this study, and that list will be for my eyes only. The tape of our interview will be marked with your code number and that number is the only way that you will be identified throughout the research. When I interview other inmates in this facility, nothing you have said will be repeated to them.

I am not a representative of any publishing company. I can do nothing to get your music published. The lyrics of prisoners' music will be analyzed to illustrate the social and social-psychological consequences of being imprisoned and to assess the world views of men and women behind bars.

If you'd like, I will send you a report of the analysis and conclusions of this research. You might want to know what kind of music has been written in prison. In
a general sense this study will report on prison songwriters who write not only for their own personal satisfaction, but also those who would like their music published.

At this point, do you have any questions about the study itself or anything else I've mentioned?

Whenever people participate in research done at the Ohio State University, the University asks them to sign a consent form. This is the University's method of making sure that you understand all the things I've mentioned so far. I'd like you to take your time and read this consent form and ask me any questions that you have about the form itself or anything mentioned in the form.
QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out this form in as much detail as you can. As you are the expert concerning your music, there may be something you think is important that I have not covered. If so, please feel free to use the back side of this form to write anything you would like to add.

PLEASE USE ONE FORM FOR EACH PIECE OF MUSIC YOU SEND ME:

YOUR NAME _______________________

I. YOUR MUSIC

1. What is the name and first line of this song?

2. What year did you write this piece of music? ______ (If you do not know exactly, please give your best estimate.)

3. Did you write this music for your own pleasure and enjoyment? Yes ______ No ________

4. Did you write this song primarily in hopes of getting it published? Yes ______ No ______

5. If you did not write it for any of the above reasons, why did you write this song?

6. What kind of music would you call this song? Please check one only!
   a. Folk____ b. Country____ c. Bluegrass____
   d. Blues____ e. Rock 'n Roll____ f. Rhythm & Blues____
   g. Rockabilly____ h. Other____

   (If you do not see the name you would call your music, please write in the "Other" category what you would call it.)
7. How would you describe the main theme of this particular piece of music? Is it about a woman you love and miss; is it about the conditions of the prison in which you were in; is it about what you plan to do when you get out? Please write out in your own words what you think the main point of the lyrics are.
YOUR NAME ____________________________

NAME OF MUSIC _______________________

II. PRISON

These questions are about the prison you were in when you wrote the piece of music for which you filled out the section: YOUR MUSIC

PLEASE FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT EVERY PIECE OF MUSIC YOU SEND ME. THEREFORE, THERE MUST BE ONE OF THESE PRISON FORMS TO GO WITH EVERY DIFFERENT PIECE OF MUSIC YOU SEND TO ME. HOWEVER, IT YOU HAVE BEEN IN ONLY ONE PRISON DURING YOUR WHOLE SONG-WRITING CAREER YOU ONLY HAVE TO FILL OUT THIS FORM ONCE. OR IF YOU WROTE ONLY WHILE IN ONE PRISON YOU ONLY HAVE TO FILL OUT THIS FORM ONCE.

1. What prison were/are you in when you wrote this song?

2. In what city and state is this prison located?

3. How would you describe this prison? Please check one!
   a. Minimum ____  b. Medium ____
   c. Maximum ____  d. Training School ____
   e. Half-Way House ____  f. Jail ____
   g. Other ____________________________

If none of the above, please check "Other" and describe in your own words what the prison was called.
4. How would you describe this particular prison? Check the main emphasis only!
   a. Punishing the individual convicted of a crime ______
   b. Trying to rehabilitate the individual so that he/she might return to society as a productive citizen ______
   c. Protecting society from future crimes he/she might commit ______

5. If your opinion differs from what the administration says this prison is supposed to do, explain why this is so.

6. Which of the above three do you think prison should do?
   a. ______ b. ______ c. ______

7. How long have/had you been imprisoned when you wrote this song? (On the current charge you are/were in for at this time)

8. How much longer do/did you expect to be in when you wrote this music?

9. Did you happen to be under any special kind of security when you wrote this music?
   Yes _________ No _________
   (If yes, what kind of security was that?)
YOUR NAME ____________________________

YOU ONLY NEED TO FILL OUT THE INFORMATION ON THIS PAGE ONCE

III. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Altogether, how many years have you been writing music? ________ years

2. Did you write music before you were in prison?
   Yes ______  No ______

3. If you only started writing music in prison, what motivated you to start writing? Was there something about the prison that helped you to write? What was that?

4. At what age were you first convicted and imprisoned? ____________________________

5. Altogether, how long have you spent in prison? ____________________________

6. What were/are you in for? (first charge ever) ____________________________

7. What was/is that sentence? (minimum and maximum) ____________________________

8. How much time did/have you served on the first offense? ____________________________

9. What is the nature of your present offense? ____________________________

10. What is the minimum and maximum sentence now being served? ____________________________
11. What is the length of time you've served on this offense so far?

________________________________________________________________________

12. What is the length of time to initial parole hearing?

________________________________________________________________________

13. In which state or country were you born and reared?

________________________________________________________________________

14. What city and state were you raised in?

________________________________________________________________________

15. Age (at last birthday)

____________________

16. Sex  Male _____  Female _____

17. Race  Black _____  White _____

Hispanic _____  Native American _____

Other  ________________________________________________________

(What is that?)

18. Highest grade of school completed

____________________

19. Have you completed any years of education in prison?

Yes _____  No _____

If yes, how many?  __________

Any completed degrees?  __________

20. Have you had any juvenile training school commitments?  Yes _____  No _____

If yes, how many?  __________

How many years did you serve?  __________
21. Have you had any prior adult commitments?
   Yes ______ No ______
   If yes, how many? ______
   How many years have/did you serve? ______

22. Altogether, how long have you spent in prison as an adult? ________________
   (What age was/is considered adult where you were first committed for an adult charge? ______)

Thank you very much for cooperating with this research. I will be happy to continue to communicate with you to the best of my ability concerning this research.
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