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The musical tradition as an affirmation of cultural identity in African American autobiography

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The Ohio State University, 1993

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The Musical Tradition As An
Affirmation of Cultural Identity
In African American Autobiography

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

Alfonso W. Hawkins, Jr., B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1993

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1993
To My Family
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African American autobiography in the twentieth century has a number of complex purposes, two of which stand out as central to understanding the literature: (1) to redefine self in terms of its place in the American experience, (2) to reconcile a dualism that emerges from this redefinition. The African American autobiography has its origins in the slave narrative and injustice of slavery. After emancipation, former slaves began the long and difficult task of affirming an identity of self which was suppressed during slavery to prevent rebellion. Nevertheless, the quest for freedom was paramount, and the slave sought freedom at every opportunity. Creative and cultural means of seeking freedom and identity resulted. "Canaan land," often referred to in Spirituals, equated the biblical promised land with freedom in the north. Slaves created Spirituals using biblical references as codes to signal escape. This would not alert the slave owner or overseer to the slaves' plan of escape. Therefore, creatively, as a means of forming a communal language, identity, and hope, the Spirituals served as
survival tools for the African American to psychologically and physically escape a world of degradation, pain, and suffering.

In twentieth century African American autobiography, the quest for justice, freedom, and social equality is reinforced through an affirmation of communal identity. As a result, the musical tradition as a cultural point of reference for identity became evident in early African American autobiographical narrative strategies. Later I will show how James Weldon Johnson (Along This Way, 1933), Zora Neale Hurston (Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942), and Langston Hughes (The Big Sea, 1940) constructed personas of the black folk character whose life and vision echoed the black musical tradition. They embodied the romance of Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz and helped to sustain these folk traditions in their autobiographies. However, it is necessary to define these musical traditions as analytic frames for this study, as metaphors for the black experience, and as genres of music directly influencing African American autobiographical prose narrative. Spirituals were praise songs for Heavenly deliverance from slavery and codes for physical escape. These songs echoed a creative and psychological freedom or relief from the toil of the soil and human bondage. James Cone in Spirituals And The Blues: An Interpretation notes that "The black experience in America is a history of servitude and
resistance, of survival in the land of death. It is the story of black life in chains and of what that meant for the souls and bodies of black people. This is the experience that created the spirituals" (20). The Spirituals were born out of the oppressive conditions of slavery. As Cone concludes "The Spiritual, then, is the spirit of the people struggling to be free; it is their religion, their source of strength in a time of trouble" (32). Spirituals tell the story of the black experience in America. Spirituals have historical and social significance when they give expression to the wails and woes of a displaced and oppressed people and culture. Moreover, Cone says "The spirituals are the story of black people's historical strivings for earthly freedom, rather than the other worldly projections of hopeless Africans who forgot about their homeland. The songs tell a historical story. . ." (15). As a result, Black identity is closely defined through the music telling a truth born out of experience. Essentially, what is outwardly sacred is also secular. Earthly freedom was its didactic message. Nevertheless, the sacred element in Spirituals could not be dismissed:

The song unites the believer to move close to the very source of black being, and to experience the black community's power to endure and the will to survive. The mountains may be high and the valleys low, but "my Lord spoke" and "out of his mouth came fire and smoke." All the believer has to do is to respond to the divine apocalyptic disclosure of God's revelation and cry, "Have mercy, please." This cry is not a cry of passivity, but a faithful, free response to the movement of the Black spirit. It is
the black community accepting themselves as the people of the Black Spirit and knowing through his presence that no chains can hold the Spirit of black humanity in bondage. (Cone 5)

The sacred and secular merge in the Spiritual. Note that even in an apparent "passive phrase" there is resistance: "a faithful, free response to the movement of the Black spirit."

The Blues, Jazz, and Gospel idioms were direct outgrowths of the Spiritual and Work Song traditions. The Blues echoed this escape through freedom of expression, telling of pain yet triumph. It affirms self in the midst of chaos and insurmountable odds. Both sacred and secular song styles projected a need for freedom of mind, spirit, and soul. The Blues is that expression which reflects the emotional state of someone who is deprived of empowerment. Born out of its sacred component, the Spiritual, the Blues reflects the past reconstruction period of continued struggle, hardships, and the need to affirm self in the face of adversity. Moreover, it also has a gender base. The Blues is a man affirming self against unrequited love. It is a woman telling the pain of forsaken love. As an analytic frame to Blues definition, James Weldon Johnson in *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* notes that "The Blues, in their primitive form, are pure folk songs. They are the philosophical expression of the individual contemplating his situation in relation to the conditions surrounding him. In this respect they are the opposite of the Spirituals, which
are an expression of the group. And, as follows naturally, the Spirituals are essentially group songs, while the Blues are essentially solos" (20). Nevertheless, the Blues soloist, by enunciating the song, reflects the group, indirectly, by affirming a self that has problems similar to those of the group. James H. Cone states "In order to affirm being, a people must create forms for the expression of being and project it with images that reflect their perceptions of reality. They must take the structure of reality and subject it to the conditions of life -- its pain, sorrow, and joy. That black people could sing the blues, describing their sorrows and joys, meant that they were able to affirm an authentic hope in the essential worth of black humanity" (141).

As a cultural expression and a metaphor for the black experience, in later chapters I will present examples of Blues twelve bar structure, second line repeating the first line, and how directly the lyric reflects the life in autobiography. Cone's general statement on the Blues is useful here:

The affirmation of self in the blues is the emphasis that connects them theologically with the spirituals. Like the spirituals, the blues affirm the somebodiness of black people, and they preserve the worth of black humanity through ritual and drama. The blues are a transformation of black life through ritual and drama. The blues are a transformation of black life through the sheer power of song. They symbolize the solidarity, the attitudes, and the identity of the black community and thus create the emotional forms of reference for endurance and esthetic appreciation. In this sense, the blues are that stoic feeling that recognizes the
painfulness of the present but refuses to surrender to its historical contradictions. (117)

The interconnectedness of the Spiritual and Blues is apparent. The musical traditions are separate as genres of music but merge through communal efforts and the "sheer toughness of spirit" behind them. "The songs contribute to the life and health (good or bad) of the community itself by affirming the common experiences of community members" (Tracy 87). As a comprehensive view here, Paul Oliver in The Story of The Blues defines the Blues as a metaphor for the Black experience and a genre of music reflecting politics, social history, and the need for self expression. He notes

Seen from any point of view, the blues is both a state of mind and a music which gives voice to it. Blues is the wail of the forsaken, the cry of independence, the passion of the lusty, the anger of the frustrated and the laughter of the fatalist. It's the agony of indecision, the despair of the jobless, the anguish of the bereaved and the dry wit of the cynic. As such the blues is the personal emotion of the individual finding through music a vehicle for self-expression. But it is also a social music; the blues can be entertainment, it can be the music for dancing and drinking by, the music of a class within a segregated group. So the blues can be the creation of artists within a folk community, whether it's in the deep rural South or in the congested ghettos of the industrial cities. (6)

For autobiographical prose narrative, "The most essential element of the blues is the feeling that derives from a lifestyle and a particular situation -- something that has happened to the singer or someone else, or that has been imagined as possible, or that has been imagined to reflect a
deeper truth about the life of the singer, though the situation is not literally possible" (Tracy 85). In the subsequent chapters, I will point out how Blues is indeed a comprehensive dynamic reflecting self in autobiography, and extending the self in fiction and poetry.

Early twentieth century African American autobiographies, in particular selected works of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that affirmed Black folk forms, upon which my research will concentrate, sought to express these trials and struggles in reaction to injustice and inequality. Jazz reflects a chaotic but creative consciousness that the African American experienced when confronted with the reality of disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, and the social inequality of second class citizenship. Jazz suggests a creative, improvised struggle for survival. "The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow, from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder him from riding free on air" (McCoy). Note that many of these African American critics, as will be shown throughout the study, soar beyond the technical definitions of the musical forms. They romanticize them as though, in the very act, they are revolting against literary and stylistic conventions. As these scholars and musicians when defining Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz soar into romance, liberation, and freedom, they are reaffirming the tradition and cultural heritage.
Therefore, when my analysis does so, I am trying to show how the writers’ narrative capture the same spirit of the romanticized definitions.

Jazz created an effective "different" path for the African American to succeed in America. Jazz is an affirmation of identity through experience. It responds to experience individually, culturally, politically, but always artistically. Ralph Ellison comments "for true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz movement springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition" ("The Charlie Christian Story" 234). Tradition plays an important role in its recognition of individuality and the music of a people. Hence the Jazz aesthetic is established. It too is "the revolt of the emotions against repression" (Rogers 111). Jazz is an individualized revolt. Born out of the same conditions that produced Blues, and as part of the African American musical tradition, Jazz fosters escape, freedom, and reaffirms cultural identity through individualism. Eileen Southern in The Music of Black Americans notes

The most salient features of jazz derive directly from the blues... Like the blues, jazz emphasizes individualism. The performer is at the same time the composer, shaping the music into style and form. A traditional melody or harmonic framework may serve as the take off point for improvisation, but it is the
personality of the player and the way he improvises that produces the music. . . . Jazz is learned through oral tradition, as is folksong. . . . Finally, Jazz was the call-and-response style of the blues, by employing an antiphonal relationship between two solo instruments or between solo and ensemble. (363)

What characterizes African American cultural traditions (call-and-response, oral traditions) are a part of the music. This multi-dimensional aspect presents the continuum of the culture in all of its creative endeavors. "To summarize, jazz was a new music created from the synthesis of certain elements in the style of its precursors" (Southern 364). The continuum is the tradition. "The sound of jazz was in the same tradition as the slaves' singing of spirituals. . . ." (Southern 364). In the dissertation, I will show that this continuum does not separate the African American cultural heritage: fiction, autobiography, and music. In addition to the improvisational aspect of Jazz characteristics noted above, the "riff" is also a basic component of Jazz, "a short phrase repeated over and over again by the ensemble" (Southern 365); therefore, the "riff" was ensemble playing suggesting the group, not the individual. The improvised solo seems more suggestive of the individual than the riff. Nevertheless, the riff is both group and individual expressions. The riff would be played the same way by the group, but changed by the individual through improvisation. The most significant aspect of this genre of music is its transcendence over imposed limitations. Technically, "the members of an
ensemble are both competing and collaborating, both respecting and ignoring the limits imposed upon them, one and all" (Tirro, *Jazz: A History*, 163). The freedom and escape mentioned as aspects of Jazz characteristics come to the fore. African American existence and survival have been based upon these characteristics: "ignoring the limits imposed upon them." This is the essence of Jazz strategy and African American life, culture, and art.

Blues and Jazz became intrinsic parts of narrative strategies that echoed displacement, sacrifice, struggle -- but hope. Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (1940), reinforce these Jazz and Blues idioms through narrative strategies that reflect the social, political, and historical context of early twentieth century African American hopes and aspirations. These autobiographers also discovered a dual identity which was articulated by W.E.B. Dubois in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In the essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" Dubois states

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (45)

The duality of being American with an African heritage was sometimes reconciled through the cultural significance of the African American musical tradition. The musical
tradition in African American culture acted as an extension of identity to communicate hopes and aspirations, and, at the same time, comment critically on America's treatment and injustice to the dispossessed and disenfranchised. Spirituals, Blues, Jazz then became metaphors for living. The music articulated experience which necessitated, in particular, a Jazz - improvised strategy to succeed and aspire towards goals.

Lawrence W. Levine in Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom explores to a great extent the origins of African American song: Spirituals, Work Songs, Blues, Jazz, and Gospel. Levine states:

Black song, of course, had many additional functions both in Africa and America. In Africa, songs, tales, proverbs, and verbal games served the dual purpose of not only preserving communal values and solidarity but also providing occasions for the individual to transcend, at least symbolically, the inevitable restrictions of his environment and his society by permitting him to express deeply held feelings which ordinarily could not be verbalized. (8)

As a function in autobiographical narration, song transcends and translates the narrative process into emotions deeply held and establishes, for the writer, a more precise definition or identity. In this sense, traditional African American song itself is autobiographical: either anonymous in that the original author is not known, or communal in that it expresses things in common in many lives, or that the singer is the autobiographer, singing about his or her
own life. Through song form in narrative strategies, cultural identity is reinforced in the Blues, Spiritual, and Jazz mode. Levine further states that the same musical repertory and traditions out of which black spirituals, work songs, and hollers were forged was sufficient to structure the blues as well. The blues was the most highly personalized, indeed, the first almost completely personalized music that Afro-Americans developed. . . The Call and Response form remained, but in blues it was the singer who responded to himself or herself either verbally or on an accompanying instrument. (221)

Thus, African American cultural identity remained intact through the use of this song form in autobiography. The traditions are continuous: slave narrative, autobiography, musical genres.

The Spiritual, Blues, and Jazz traditions are the folk music of the African American. They are what characterize and identify African American life through the slave past and post reconstruction period. The songs live the life presented in autobiography. Note "In keeping with his traditions, the ex-slave sang about his experiences -- his new freedom, his new occupations, the strange ways of the city, current events, and his feelings of rootlessness and loneliness. Above all he sought a self-identity" (Southern 222). It is this "self-identity" that remains the essential part of autobiography; in particular, African American autobiography that identifies the individual and group.

Sidonie Smith in Where I'm Bound adds that "writing about that struggle is certainly a way of assessing the
nature and cost of success as well as a way of reaffirming it" (46). The music reflects the struggle; it reiterates the life -- the struggle: The two -- music and narrative -- achieve a oneness of cultural identity. The art is a creative effort and expression to affirm black being. Stephen Butterfield reiterates "any good autobiography does two things for the reader: affirms his potential worth, and calls his realization of that worth into question by telling a true story of someone who has travelled a different path" (Black Autobiography in America, 1). This "different path" produced the music. It was the impulse that projected the music into the portrayed life. Autobiography is "personalized," and the "singer" gives expression to events and experiences that define and identify him or her in American culture. African American musical expression is, in some ways, an autobiographical act. The singer extends the solo voice to encompass his or her community. The soloist, through common experience and expression, is the story teller, the song. Levine observes that song "allowed them to assert themselves and their feelings and their values, to communicate continuously with themselves and their peers and their oppressors as well" (297).

In order to effectively explore the musical tradition inherent in African American autobiography, it is crucial to define autobiography, or, what is considered autobiographical writing. An autobiography is a self script -- a
biography of a person written by him or her self; a story of a person’s life written by that person. An autobiography is a narrative which can be written in several different forms: the contemporaneous letter, diary, or journal -- or as a retrospective document. It encompasses one’s passions and life experiences that others can vicariously live and share. An autobiography is a channel of communication that has the power to touch so many lives by common experiences and goals. It has the capacity to inspire hope, dreams, and fulfill these aspirations. For example, if one’s life has been a daily struggle, confronted with obstacles and impediments, an autobiography of a person who has experienced these same problems and overcome them can inspire the reader to endure and survive.

However inspiring, an autobiography can be unreliable. It has the license to cloud and suppress, exaggerate and enhance. Yet, autobiography is only a representation of that experience, not the experience itself. Factual or fictive, these strategies are a means toward this expression of self identity. It can be derived culturally, politically, or morally. For the African American, self identity is realized in all three social dynamics born directly out of the American experience. For example, James Weldon Johnson concludes that any Negro is tolerable in the United States as long as he or she isn’t American. This conclusion is based on an incident in which he was only allowed to sit in
a first class car when the porter heard Johnson speaking fluent Spanish and took him for a foreigner.

Symbolic representation of true experience underlies narration; that is, the metaphor can act as a strategy that reinforces a precept, parable, story. It becomes a technique by which identity is revealed. It is the essential part of the song, the music. In African American life and experience, the message takes on this musical interpretation and forms an identity. Therefore, structure plays an important part in how the author reveals parts of his or her life. African American musical tradition (Spirituals, Blues, Jazz) takes the voice of the author a step further. The author's constructed self, interpreted from this musical tradition, translate a closer truth, reflecting folk identity. The echoes, songs, and feelings of the ancestors are transferred into autobiographical expression.

To further illustrate this musical interpretive theory and its correlation to language and structure, Elizabeth Schultz's essay "To Be Black and Blue" explores the structure and form of two dimensions in African American autobiography: Testimonial and Blues. Schultz indicates that "often in these testimonial autobiographies, the personal voice is subsumed by the writer's desire to minimize himself because of the urgency of his theme. Not intimate facts of personal history omitted, but lengthy documents or newspaper
accounts are included to prove objectively the historicity of a specific theme" (113). Thus, in the testimonial the writer develops his or her convictions and emphasizes a theme or lesson for the reader. The blues singer or autobiographer shows, through narration, his or her convictions in reaction to every day experiences and struggles. A dominant theme is not articulated early; however, it is "subsumed" in the narrative, daily events, and personal thoughts. Essentially, "the blues singer or autobiographer, by articulating his experiences -- by fingoering them in his consciousness, by grasping to give them verbal or musical expression -- makes them comprehensible to himself and to those who listen to him, and thereby he transcends them" (Schultz 116). Schultz examines this interesting stylistic approach in African American autobiographical writing and captures the musical tradition here. From direct self expression, we, as readers, are totally involved in the autobiographical act of life and living. Thus, testimonial and blues dynamics are essential parts of the African American autobiography. Schultz skillfully relates them as they appear stylistically. Accordingly, she notes "whereas the testimonial autobiographer strives to convey accuracy of historical fact, the blues autobiographer seems primarily concerned with the emotional accuracy of experience" (29). As a result, this "emotional accuracy" found in African American musical tradition gives meaning
and intensity to the autobiographical narration. Life is filled with emotions. Through narration, music or song structure further illustrates these emotions. Also, through this social dynamic, we learn lessons, and learn from the testimonies of people who have influenced and made a mark in the continuing cultural strivings that reconcile identity. Therefore, we come closer to reconciling the duality that exists in African American identity.

The problem the dissertation will approach is The Musical Tradition as an Affirmation of Cultural Identity in African American Autobiography. In order to show how the African American musical tradition is embedded in literature, I will also draw upon H. Nigel Thomas' From Folklore to Fiction: A Study of Folk Heroes and Rituals in the Black American Novel, in which he looks at the various folklore elements and their historical significance that are incorporated in African American literature. Thomas relates or connects the African American musical tradition to its African folk heritage. As a foundation for interpretation, Thomas examines how folklore has been an integral part of African American literature; thus, the musical tradition is interrelated to the written literature. He states:

to study folklore of black Americans is to examine their dreams, their aspirations, the mental curtains they designed to shut out the brutality of slave and post slave reality, the psychic wings on which they bore themselves temporarily away from oppressive pain, as well as the aesthetic objects -- the blues,
Thus, the musical tradition here gives texture and meaning to the autobiographical act. Thomas states that Jazz, as a trope, extends the autobiographical act and incorporates within it the improvisation of the trickster: "Jazz was created to respond to varying needs of Afro Americans, one of them being an attempt to overcome through pleasure the pain of prejudice, another being to continue, even if in vestigial form, West African customs that had not been totally forgotten" (24). Thomas here shows how the trickster figure in African American literature has been characterized in the Jazz mode. The pain of oppression can be narrated through the Jazz -- detailing the emotional circumstances surrounding the experience. Moreover the trickster uses cunning, guile, and craft to overcome obstacles. Thomas gives us the elements needed to fully comprehend and interpret the folk and musical tradition that characterize African American literature. Thereby, cultural identity is better reaffirmed through a musical interpretation.

In accordance with the musical and folk components of the trickster trope, Henry Louis Gates, in The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism, defines and shows how the technique of signifyin(g) is inherent in African American narrative strategies. He notes: "Signifyin(g) is the figurative difference between
the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning. . . . Signifyin(g) presupposes an 'encoded' intuition to say one thing but to mean quite another" (82).

Gates extends this "trickster" trope found in African American folk and literary tradition to a musical reading. Signifyin(g), like Jazz, incorporates cunning, guile, and cleverness to effect, rhetorically, a victory over an opponent or obstacle. In terms of the Jazz tradition, Gates notes that a "riff" is the foundation or core, soul of Jazz structure. It gives to music identity, feeling, and life. Gates explains "the riff is a central component of Jazz improvisation and signifyin(g) and serves as an especially appropriate synonym for troping and for revision" (105). In the autobiographical act, the riff is central. Particularly in testimonial autobiographies, the "riff" repeats important themes and maintains the "structure" that culturally identifies the singer (writer) and the song (theme/autobiography).

Thus, signifyin(g) is interrelated with the Jazz and Blues tradition. Both are characterized by improvisation, implication, and revision, yet maintain an identified structure. Gates further notes that

in the Jazz tradition, compositions by Count Basie ("Signify") and Oscar Peterson ("Signifying") are structured around the idea of formal revision and implication. When a musician "signifies" a beat, he is playing the upbeat into the downbeat of the chorus, implying their formal relationship by merging the two structures together to create an ellipsis of the downbeat. The downbeat, then, is rendered present by its absence. This is a revision of an aspect of the blues. (123)
Therefore, a musical reading of African American autobiographical narrative strategies would suggest elements of signifyin(g), demonstrating Jazz and Blues structures reinforced with the pervasive "riff" and the infusion of metaphoric symbols. The riff and metaphor bring the oral (sound) and written (narrative) together to create the music, the song -- which attempts to identify the singer (autobiographer).

To supplement Gates' musical interpretations found in the African American narrative, I will use Roger Abrahams' collection, Afro American Folktales. Abrahams presents folktales that have historically distinguished and identified the African American in the world community. The folktale is another form of literary expression that has affirmed cultural identity through suppression and oppression. Abrahams notes

like other forms of Afro American creative inventions -- song, dance, and a range of techniques of body adornment -- these tales testify not only to the perseverance of an uprooted and enslaved people but to the vitality of the cultural traditions they were able to maintain and build upon. The elements of storytelling were included in the only "baggage" they could carry with them: their traditional styles of personal and social adornment, as well as their ways of performing and celebrating. (4)

The story or tale, like its counterpart in musical expression, defines and identifies a culture, group or community. What is uniquely theirs is found in creative expression. Furthermore, Abrahams states that "these tales, then, like the many flowerings of the improvisatory spirit
by which the black world has always distinguished itself in
the commonality of nations -- through developing forms like
jazz and the mambo, the blues and bossa nova, calypso and
calinda -- are evidence of a great ability to bring meaning
to the most seemingly insignificant materials and movement" (4). Thus, creative expression through musical genres and
structures in the African American literary tradition is
merely an extension of the folk tradition. A musical
reading of narrative enhances the improvisation, pain, and
strength which is interpreted in Jazz, Blues, and
Spirituals.

To complement the folk tradition here, *Mother Wit From
The Laughing Barrel*, edited by Alan Dundes, is a series of
essays that deal with folk and musical traditions in African
American literature and in the culture itself. Dundes links
folklore to cultural identity. He states: "any group of
people who share at least one linking factor -- be it occu­
pation, religion, or ethnicity -- qualify as a 'folk'" (1). Thus, African American musical tradition links a folk group.
Through autobiography, the musical tradition serves as a
linking device that reinforces folk elements in African
American writing and culture. This parallel is found in
Stanley Edgar Hyman's essay on "The Folk Tradition," in
Dundes' collection. Hyman observes: "The relationship of
Negro writing to the blues is, if anything, even more imme­
diately visible than its relationship to the folk tale"
Just as the Blues is characterized by travel, a journey, so African American literature emphasizes this theme. Movement has been a very strong thematic motif in African American autobiographical narration, which originated in the slave narrative. The bondage to freedom motif, the journey north and escape from oppressive conditions characterizes the autobiographical works of, for example, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston. In a final analysis, Hyman captures this observation in Ellison's article "Richard Wright's Blues:"

"the Blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism" (54). Hyman notes Ellison's musical reading of Wright's Black Boy. Thus, Dundes here presents a comprehensive study and analysis in folk and musical traditions that have contributed to and defined African American literary culture.

To extend this kind of "folk" autobiographical dynamic interpreted through African American musical expression, Houston A. Baker's Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro American Women's Writings, his third study in the series of African American women's writings, explores the folk traditions of song and conjuring. Baker's assessment of the Blues focuses on the tradition within the tradition.
Simply, the Blues follows or is associated with trials and struggles through life. For African American women, the Blues ranges from sexual exploitation to the drudgery of domestic work. Baker, here, to further illustrate this point, cites Richard Wright's definition of the Blues in "12 Million Voices":

Wright defines such song as the expression that keeps alive deep down in us a hope of what life could be, so now, with death ever hard at our heels, we pour forth in song and dance, without stint or shame, a sense of what our bodies want, a hint of our hope of a full life lived without fear, a whisper of the natural dignity we feel life can have, a cry of hunger for something new to fill our souls, to reconcile the ecstasy of living with the terror of dignity. (132)

Here, this definition suggests that the Blues is personal, although it has the power and capacity to capture what is uniquely inherent in a group or community. The Blues, albeit expressive, is real. It is an expression of a reality that remains intact and exists. Houston Baker notes "by song here, I do not mean only blues stanzas, of course, but, rather, an alternative expressive impulse in Afro American life and culture that provides a notion of PLACE . . . . The blues stand as the sign of a domestic writing of the dynamics of Afro American PLACE . . . ." (132).

Certainly the concept of Place is inherent in African American identity. Note that "Place" is itself a metaphor for situation, not literally a geographical location. The dualism noted earlier shapes self perception; thereby, Place in African American identity, through social, economic, and
historical forces, determines the music -- the expression. Place is a state of mind that reflects these social forces. For example, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston lived in and directly experienced Jim Crow America. Their autobiographies are testimonies of survival, defeat, and victory. Place, here, stands as a metaphoric mountain -- an obstacle imposed to separate. Reconciling cultural and personal identity in autobiographical narrative, through a musical interpretation where the concept of Place is so evident and prevalent, closes this separation and truly identifies. Both images, music and Place, reflect both a soaring (escape), flying, and earthbound, mundane everyday reality. Through autobiography, these elements reflect a musical tradition that transcends sound and is inherent in language.

Joanne Braxton explores the world of the African American woman autobiographer and narrator in Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition. Braxton initially became interested in autobiographies from the stories her grandmother told her. As a black woman, Braxton related to the "sisterhood" of these stories. She felt a bond that was commonly shared by all black women -- "blackness and womanhood." She confides: "as black women, we are born into a mystic sisterhood, and we live our lives within a magic circle, a realm of shared language, reference, and allusion within the veil of our blackness and our female-
ness" (1). "Art and thought cannot be separate (Cone 9). In essence, Braxton attests, "like the blues, most autobiographies by black Americans, male and female, tend to have a dominant internal strategy of action rather than contemplation. And, like the blues singer, the autobiographer incorporates communal values into the performance of the autobiographical act, sometimes rising to function as the 'point of consciousness' of her people" (15). To reinforce this point, Cone argues that "spirituals and blues were a way of life, an artistic affirmation of the meaningfulness of black existence" (7). Through the commonality of a sacred musical tradition, the African American autobiographer can share a communal experience relating how faith in God has given him or her strength to survive oppression. Inherent in this message is the Spiritual narrative strategy interwoven in a Blues and Jazz patois. These musical genres become interrelated as the autobiographer tells his or her story. Through this dimension, Braxton's study focuses on the "communal" spirit and values that hold together the sisterhood of the African American woman. African American women autobiographers find self identity and expression through this commonality.

From a comprehensive standpoint, African American autobiography is clearly a structural continuation of the slave narrative -- recontextualizing the text, putting autobiography back into its musical cultural context.
Stephen Butterfield in *Black Autobiography in America* examines the early stylistic occurrences found in the African American autobiography. He notes "although black writers in the slavery period wrote according to the standards of English and American whites and imitated the style of their white models, at the same time they imitated traditions that were developed and refined by their descendants into something distinctly 'black'" (31).

Scholarship on the African American autobiography serves a two-fold purpose: (1) Interprets and examines the life behind each autobiography: (2) Analyzes the style and structure. African American autobiographical writing in the twentieth century, like the slave narrative, is a testimony of experience. Thus, one of the important tasks of the scholar is to examine and interpret the aim and purpose of the writer. Why is it necessary that a man or woman write his or her life story? What are implications and lessons behind the story? Is the message one that asserts meaning, pride, truth, and survival techniques? These questions are analyzed by those who study autobiographical writing. Therefore, the inevitable study of style and structure as tools in autobiographical writing explores the multi-dimensions of the genre; the musical tradition in African American culture further adds to this narrative dimension. It encompasses the writers' emotions and reactions, thoughts and plans of action. Music has been coined as "the univer-
through words, the autobiographer can powerfully evoke, manipulate, and challenge his or her readers to produce and effect social change. Universally, narrative through musical interpretations transcends language barriers (through translation). The flavor and feel of the author's words are enhanced, providing the most direct means of truth and communication. Thus, we, as researchers, can comprehend and interpret the aims and values of this aesthetic dimension. African American autobiographical scholarship seeks to examine this dimension and connect it to a wider social and historical dynamic.

My general approach in exploring this topic shall be taken from contextual and mimetic and didactic descriptions or functions of literature. Mimetic meaning the art reflects life, and didactic meaning that the narrative has a moral or social purpose -- a message. I shall look at the contextual background from which each author writes and lives. The contextual background would include the social, historical, and cultural circumstances that have played an important, influential role in the writer's life. African American musical tradition is part of that historical and cultural context that defined and affirmed African American identity. Thus, through this "identity" crisis characterized by the duality of the African and American heritage and experience, the African American has sought to
express and create a tradition that reflects these two origins or conditions. The blood of one has roots planted in the other.

Historically, African American autobiographical writing has served as a document for American history. The slave narrative related the dangers slaves faced under slave laws and how these laws affected the north and the south. These narratives pushed for the abolitionist cause. The suppressive laws that African Americans had to contend with regarding equal justice, civil and political rights, and full citizenship created material for a Blues structure in autobiographical narrative strategies. Hardships and pain are the Blues; hope and faith can be seen through spiritual references; yet, the Blues is inherent in these character attributes.

Cultural expressions are affirmations of identity. They give a group or community a badge, a spirit, a connection; culture is its life blood. Yet culture is not a monolithic force. It is really dynamic and fragmented, multiple forces that pull apart as well as unite. For example, some traditional African American musical forms are accepted by the total African American community. The religious minded prefer spiritual sentiments in musical expression such as Spirituals and Gospel music. Musical expression, whether religious or secular, plays an extremely important role in culture. Through the narrative, music becomes the inner
strain that shapes, defines, and mimics the word, mood, or expression. During the Jim Crow era, African American culture had lived freely and defiantly. Through Langston Hughes' poetry, James Weldon Johnson's songs, and Zora Neale Hurston's folk discoveries, African American culture reaffirmed African American identity and gave it roots, recognition, and exuberance. And, as a result, America is richer -- culturally, socially, and historically.

In Amiri Baraka's foreword to Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (1940), Baraka states: "Langston is the Jazz Poet! the constant communicator of Blues. He is the singer, the philosopher, the folk and urban lyricist." This point is illustrated in Hughes' narrative strategy when detailing the steps that led to his first published poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Hughes richly notes American history through imagery here: "I looked out the window of the Pullman at the great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the south, and I began to think what that river, the old Mississippi, had meant to Negroes... to be sold down the river was the worst fate.... Then I began to think about other rivers in our past -- the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa --..." (55). The Blues -- painful, yet hopeful, is the strain living in this narrative. Moreover, Hughes' direct Blues influence is shown in the following poem "Blues At Dawn". This three structure unit: second line repeating the first, and a new third line in a
traditional twelve bar Blues, the poet is the Bluesman —
"the constant communicator of Blues."

I don't dare start thinking in the morning.
I don't dare start thinking in the morning.
If I thought thoughts in bed,
Then thoughts would bust my head --
So I don't dare start thinking in the morning.

I don't dare remember in the morning,
Don't dare remember in the morning.
If I recall the day before,
I wouldn't get up no more --
So I don't dare remember in the morning.

(Hughes, Bontemps, eds. The Book of Negro Folklore)

James Weldon Johnson in Along This Way (1933)
similarly shows Jazz, Blues and Spiritual narrative expressions. Noting how a Jim Crow law first introduced him to American racism, Johnson explains how a train's conductor tried to enforce this law: "You'll be likely to have trouble if you try to stay in this car.' Ricardo...asked me, 'Que dice?...' As soon as the conductor heard us speaking a foreign language, his attitude changed; .... this conductor drove home to me the conclusion that in such situations any kind of a Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (65). Johnson, here, is the singer of the Blues. Hope in America, though, is not yet foreign to Johnson. It is this hope that creates this Blues reading and expression. It is the faith that was founded in the Negro Spiritual. However, Johnson's revelation about American society was expressed in Blues; its spiritual root maintains the element of hope. Thus, equanimity is a major attribute of the Spiritual. A philosophical truth can be
observed. Johnson explains "I learned that by keeping my temper I could deal with irrationality, even with cases of violent race prejudice" (Along This Way, 387). I will also relate this observation later to the Spiritual's process of "purification."

Zora Neale Hurston in her autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road (1942) further exhibits this musical tradition in African American narrative. Speaking out on her disgust with the black middle class, she notes: "Once, when they used to set their mouths in what they thought was the Boston Crimp, and ask me about the great differences between the ordinary Negro and 'the better-thinking Negro,' I used to show my irritation by saying I did not know who the better-thinking Negro was.... Since they (middle class) can find no comfort where they happened to be born, no especial talents to lift them, and other doors are closed to them, they have to have to find some pleasure somewhere in life. They have to use whatever their mentality provides. 'My People! My People!'" (170). As an example of cultural conflict within "one" culture, the Blues here is evident. There is pain in Hurston's discourse: the relegated circumstance of the black middle class. She notes "they can find no comfort where they happen to be born, no especial talents to lift them." Furthermore, "other doors are closed to them." Hurston's "Blues" defines status and gives meaning to what it is to be black and middle class in Jim Crow America. However, in
Hurston’s disappointment, she does find the possibility that even in the worst of situations, hope exists. Love transcends faults. Love, too, is highly critical. Hurston loves 'my people;' to express this love, Blues structures and strategies (joy-sorrow, love-hate, hope-despair) exemplify the best and worst in human nature.

Therefore, my dissertation topic "The Musical Tradition As An Affirmation of Cultural Identity in African American Autobiography" explores the musical reading of African American autobiographical writing. This research will encompass the historical, political, and social aspects of African American life and thought. Culture identifies who we are, want to be, and, perhaps, predicts what we will become. Through the African American musical tradition, these identifiable traits, seen through this musical perspective, become even more precise and accurate. Each musical genre gives a word, expression, or message a mood and flavor. For example, Negro Spirituals reinforce the elements of faith, hope, strength to endure trials and hardships. African American autobiography, from its origins in the slave narrative, is replete with this faith. Its secular component in the Blues retains this faith and hope. Even though the Blues narrative details trials and tribulations, it maintains that special something that allows life to continue, to grow. Jazz, too, retains this spirit. Throughout the African American literary tradition, Jazz
strategies or improvisation played important roles in characterization, scheme, and plot. Hence, the trickster folk figure (e.g., Brer Rabbit) outsmarted a much larger and powerful opponent (lion, fox).

The representative autobiographies through which I shall explore and identify musical traits are the following: James Weldon Johnson's *Along This Way* (1933), Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) and Langston Hughes *The Big Sea* (1940). Some research questions that arise from this study are (1) What is the significance of this study to scholars of autobiography and African American autobiography in particular; (2) Why is it important to study or explore a musical reading of the African American autobiographical tradition; (3) Can you truly gain a perspective of African American cultural identity through a musical reading of the tradition? I have sought to answer these questions throughout this Introduction. However, new dimensions can be added here. The autobiography, a self-script, or biography of a person written by that person, captures mood, sentiment, and feeling. However unreliable, the autobiography serves as a statement -- a personal statement that identifies or defines a person. It has the persuasive power to alter reputations. Therefore, scholars of autobiography and African American autobiography in particular can add to their knowledge an even closer and more precise cultural reading that defines and identifies.
A musical reading of the tradition takes into consideration the contextual complement and basis of an African American character. Musical expression enhances the lyric which, together, creates the song. Musical expression, therefore, enhances the word or sentence and we, as readers and scholars, are able to see definition -- more precisely and accurately. It is the essence of community and ethnic identity. Music is the spirit behind the life: the common thread behind the community. Through a musical interpretation in affirming cultural identity, African American autobiography gives us a rich musical setting. This setting has its roots in an African tradition. Through this interpretation, the diaspora is connected and extended into American culture. Also through a musical reading of African American autobiography, an attempt can be made to not only come closer to what is truly African American, but what constitutes and contributes to what is truly American. In defining and identifying the African American through autobiography, we identify and define America.
CHAPTER I
James Weldon Johnson
Along This Way

The African American musical tradition from its West African roots reflects the Black American experience. This unique experience was the basis for a unique musical style. African survivals in the music persisted. Melville J. Herskovits states that "it was first assumed that, in essence, the songs of the Negroes represented a welling forth of the anguish experienced under slavery. In time, however, opinion grew that, since this music differed from other forms of musical expression, Africa was to be looked to for an explanation of its essential characteristics" (262). Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz contain essential characteristics of African survivals.

Among these intangibles is the close integration between song and dance found everywhere in Africa. Motion pictures of African choruses accompanying their soloists show that even handclapping can become a dance, while in the New World this tendency to 'dance the song,' whether it is religious or secular, is a commonplace. Improvisation is similarly a deeply rooted device of African singing. With broad social implications, especially in the songs of recrimination so widely distributed in negro cultures,
its effect as a mechanism making for variation in the music of different peoples and in developing individual style calls for careful study. (Herskovits 265)

Made up of various cultures and born out of these cultures and traditions, America becomes a unique experience for everyone who claims it home. For the African American, in particular, whose experience in America was born out of the harsh reality of slavery, America has presented itself as a perplexed, chaotic, and peculiar home. The house, whose sanctuary is supposed to shelter, has the inclination to repress and inhibit. The slave experience for African Americans in this American house was one of daily toil and struggle, repressing and inhibiting the fruits of labor: "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Because of the prohibition of these unrealized "truths," the African American had to create sources of hope and release.

The traditional Spiritual was born out of this need to express hope, that the future would be free of oppression. While an earthly freedom was its theme, heavenly solace was also its prayer. William B. McClain notes that the Spirituals were a "theology of experience -- the theology of a God who . . . is very much alive and active and who has not forsaken those who are poor and oppressed and unemployed. . . . Fear is turned to hope in the sanctuaries
and storefronts, and bursts forth in songs of celebration. It is a theology of grace that allows the faithful to see the sunshine of His face -- even through their tears. . ." (McClain, x). To James Weldon Johnson, as he depicts it through his autobiography *Along This Way*, the Spiritual is that bedrock and source of inspiration and survival. It becomes, in essence, a technique "for survival that the masses have evolved through the experience of generations. They used the methods available" (*Along This Way*, 120). Langston Hughes writes "(Spirituals) said, 'Deep river, my home is over Jordon. . . Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. . . Before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free'" (Liner notes, Harry Belafonte, "O'Lord What A Morning" RCA VICTOR 7172). These "protest" songs were the weapons of an oppressed and enslaved people. The beauty and charm of the Spirituals lie in their effort to encourage the singers to serve with dignity a God who gives them strength to not hate or harm their oppressors but display love where it is barren, faith where it is weak, and humanity where it does not exist. Levine notes too that just as the process by which the spirituals were created allowed for simultaneous individual and communal creativity, so their very structure provided simultaneous outlets for individual and communal expression. The overriding antiphonal structure of the spirituals -- the call and response pattern which Negroes brought with them from Africa and which was reinforced in America by the practice of living out hymns -- placed the individual in continual dialogue with his community, allowing him at one and the same
time to preserve his voice as a distinct entity and to blend it with those of his followers. (33)

James Weldon Johnson's life as he presents it in Along This Way (1933) is a story of such courage, strength, individual and communal values. Robert Fleming notes that "Along This Way is not only a record of what happened to its author, but a spiritual autobiography and a record of his observations and thoughts as he traveled 'along his way'" (94-95). Even though Johnson later revealed that he was an agnostic, he viewed the Spirituals as historic cultural art forms and artifacts that identified his heritage. He used them as metaphors of the African American experience. Johnson recalls during his freshman year at Atlanta University his and his roommate's agnosticism. "Porter and I bore the unpopular distinction of being the only self-acknowledged agnostic in the school. . . . His agnosticism went farther than mine and was based upon a more extensive reading. His renunciation of religious conformity went farther than mine" (Along This Way, 105). Thus, Johnson's constructed persona was that of recorder and preserver of the vital role and history of the musical tradition in the African American community. Johnson was guided by the song of service, which characterizes the Spiritual; service to God through his agency in humanity. James Weldon Johnson was born on June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, Florida. Music became a source of pleasure and inner tranquility for the young Johnson. He describes his old piano as "a tinkling
old instrument but a source of rapturous pleasure" (9). This "tinkling old instrument" became a symbol of aesthetic beauty and artistic freedom for Johnson to explore his own creativity and self-identity through art. His mother, Helen Louise Dillet Johnson, gave her son grounding for what were to become his attitudes regarding self respect, music, and service. Helen Louise Johnson, according to her son, was "a non-conformist and a rebel" (10). This attitude was born out of his mother's Jim Crow experiences and observations. Johnson relates the story how his mother was told that she could not worship at St. John's Episcopal Church. As a result, she "followed her mother and joined Ebenezer, the colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, and became the choir leader" (10). Thus, as choir leader, Helen Louise Johnson instilled the type of music in Johnson that reflects sorrow and, yet, hope. When the young Johnson became aware of his mother's experiences, coupled with her song selections, he became endowed with a sense of spiritual strength. This strength is the faith and hope that God nurtures forebearance in the face of humiliation, prejudice, and discrimination. This forebearance enlivenes and reinforces a quiet fire, rage, and resentment wearing the clothes of humility, self respect, and pride. The Spirituals provided a form, structure, and vocabulary for these attributes; in doing so, they linked Johnson's individual experience to a communal one.
Mary Louise Johnson, Johnson's first music teacher, shows him that song indeed reflects pride and dignity. A song should be selected to capture mood, temperament, and attitude. It is a voice -- a very important voice that stirs truth. For example, when Ebenezer Church received word that their member Lemuel W. Livingstone was denied admission into West Point Academy, Johnson's mother refused to sing "America" as a hymn during that same service. There is a political statement in her action: the duality of being identified as an American who cannot fully participate in American society. Here, Johnson receives early training that song is an important voice. It can be a tool that stirs the soul. Song, through the Spiritual, honors God, the self, and produces self-respect and responsibility (service). He grew and waxed strong in this training and tradition. Spirituals "oppose racism and long for a racially just society where human equality under the sovereignty of God is achieved. They are not simply songs, but principles and a point of view. And these principles and point of view became the bedrock of a religious tradition. God is on the side of the oppressed" (McClain, "Preface" ix). The Spiritual responds to duty and performance. Johnson embraced both concepts. Johnson reinforces this training when he recalls how he and his brother, Rosamond, would pay close attention to their mother in the selection of Spirituals. This lends itself to discipline -- the
education needed to be selective and discriminating. The Johnson brothers exemplified these qualities later in life when they became a songwriting team along with Bob Cole and editors of two collections of Spirituals: The Book of American Negro Spirituals (1925) and The Second Book of American Negro Spirituals (1926). Johnson reveals "Before we began to learn our notes and the keys of the instrument, we used to stand, whenever we were allowed, close by on either side while she picked out hymns or other simple pieces" (14). Thus, Mary Louise Johnson instilled in both her sons qualities that would lead them into a life of service -- influenced by Spirituals.

The context by which Johnson was to read and digest these Spirituals articulated in the autobiography was through, appropriately, the Black experience. His childhood environment was largely segregated. This would, again, lend itself to Johnson's overwhelming desire to serve his community with their best interests always in mind. This is the essence of the Spiritual:

For it has been Black people's understanding of God in the context of their own experience, i.e., the Black experience, in which they have groped for meaning, relevance, worth, assurance, reconciliation, and their proper response to the God revealed in nature and in Jesus Christ. And whatever point of the history of Black people and their religion in America one may wish to view, the gathering of the community in worship and praise to almighty God is central and pivotal to what happens afterward. It is the fulcrum of the souls of Black folks. (McClain, ix)
Through the Black church, from which Johnson’s mother imparted her musical knowledge, this gathering and praise grew within the boy who was to become leader, writer, voicing community concerns and aspirations. This is the reason why much of Johnson’s musical message was one of service -- responding to need, finding a voice for that need, and implementing it in a well disciplined plan and strategy. Johnson’s home is the African American community. Its tears, toils, and tragedies are his. The following Spiritual collected by Johnson reflects this childhood grounding:

I Got a home in - a dat Rock, Don’t you see?  
Between de earth an’ sky, Thought I heard my Savior cry,  
You got a home in - a dat Rock, Don’t you see?  
Poor man Lazrus, poor as I, Don’t you see?  
Poor man Lazrus, poor as I, When he died he foun’ a home on high.  
He had a home in - a dat Rock, Don’t you see?  
Rich man, Dives, He lived so well, Don’t you see?  
Rich man, Dives, he lived so well, when he died he foun’ a home in Hell,  
He had no home in - a dat Rock, Don’t you see?  
(Book of American Negro Spirituals, 96).

Thus, like "Lazrus," the African American community when confronting racism (Jim Crow), should realize that there is a home in the rocks of faith, hope, and strength. Johnson’s rock from which he grew was his mother’s precepts and examples through song selection, restraint, and non-conformity. He learned these values, and they grew into service. We shall see this revelation as Johnson’s life unfolds and matures.
His father, James Johnson, gave his son the rock of honesty -- another "spiritual" foundation which characterizes service. Often wisdom and understanding are not easily recognized. It takes maturity and perspicacity to realize these traits, especially in a member of the immediate family. This was Johnson's revelation. He relates

no boy can make a fair estimate of his father. I was thirty years old before I was able to do it. The average boy all along thinks highly of his mother. In manhood he is likely even to sentimentalize her faults into tender virtues. With his male parent it is not so; his opinion goes through a range of changes and tends to be critical rather than sentimental. Up to ten a boy thinks his father knows everything; at twenty he indulgently looks upon the 'old man' as a back number or, maybe, something less complimentary; at thirty, if the boy himself has any sense, he recognizes all of his father's qualities pretty fairly. (16)

This all lends to the faults of youth; however, Johnson was nurtured properly by the foundation of spiritual principles and conduct. It is evident in Along This Way that Johnson showed that he never diverted from these established precepts -- rocks of honesty, non-conformity, discipline, and discretion. Of course youthful shortcomings are a part of normal life; Johnson maintained integrity fostered by a sense of responsibility that was nurtured at home. Yes, he found a home in that rock. It was reinforced by his father's standards for living. His father James Johnson built up a reputation in both the Black and White communities that recognized him as an upright man. His standing was something Johnson immediately took notice of.
It filled him with a dignity that could not be weakened in the face of Jim Crow. Johnson's home in that "rock" made him the servant for humanity -- called to lead and direct with the uncompromising faith from those he serves. Johnson notes "my father was a quiet, unpretentious man. He was naturally conservative and cautious, and generally displayed common sense in what he said and did" (17). James Johnson imparted these qualities to his son. Johnson made decisions based upon discretion and caution. While principal at Stanton, and as a lawyer, songwriter, NAACP officer, and U.S. Consul, Johnson made decisions that benefited all concerned. This is the "rock" he received from a father who lived a life of service. Most of all, Johnson received honesty from his father: "The quality in my father that impressed me most was his high and rigid sense of honesty" (17). And this quality was to serve Johnson throughout his life in building a reputation of trust and sincerity. This trait also captures the essence of, in particular, Spirituals.

The sincerity of a Spiritual gives it life. It opens up and reveals to all the majestic soaring nature of emotions, utterances, and words. The music reflects an identity that is trying to burst from the shadows of repression and restriction. This identity tries to reconcile two warring ends: a duality that resists union. The American, the African, through the Spiritual, merge. As
a result, honesty and sincerity become the attributes found in the music, while in search for this oneness of identity. Johnson reinforces this notion with references to the Spiritual: "Perhaps there will be no better point than this at which to say that all the true Spirituals possess dignity" (The Book of Negro American Spirituals, 13). Therefore, the pursuit of truth is an important element that produces dignity, honesty and with it character, values -- the essence of true service. This is what James Johnson had; this is the legacy he left for his son. The evidence is in the music and service Johnson gave to humanity, presented in Along This Way.

Regarding Spirituals, Johnson reaffirms that the "voice," the "singer" "Was in dead earnest. These Spirituals cannot be properly appreciated or understood unless they are clothed in their primitive dignity" (13, 14). By imitation, precept, and example, Johnson became an architect. He gave shape and mold to Spiritual voicings, messages, and sentiments, in addition to educating the public and scholars about Spirituals through two publications: The Book of Negro American Spirituals Volumes 1 and 2. When called to serve in the capacity of a lawyer, politician, or educator, his responsibility encompasses all that the Spiritual provides: dignity, self worth, hope, and honesty. These traits can easily be applied to Johnson. In
the autobiography, he echoes this fact because he had a home in that rock:

The years made upon me as a child by my parents are constantly strengthening controls over my forms of habit, behavior, and conduct as a man. It appeared to me, starting into manhood, that I was to grow into something different from them; into something on a so much larger plan, a so much grander scale. As life tapers off I can see that in the deep and fundamental qualities I am each day more and more like them. (19)

Thus, proper nurture produces qualities and standards set forth. For James Weldon Johnson, his parents, James and Mary Louise Johnson, set forth a prescription for living encompassed in music that generates dignity and honesty and the discipline to maintain those values. James Weldon Johnson had a home in that rock of love.

Johnson was further grounded in a life of service in the church. The church has been and remains a strong force in the African American community. Its tradition of nurture, community, and worship create a sanctuary from the harsh reality of the outside world. Particularly in the United States, like other African American cultural expressions, "it appears from the historical evidence that the religion of the American negro and his church organization grew out of his experiences on American soil" (The Negro In The United States, 334). The black church cultivates identity and reminds its oppressed members that new days dawn and Heaven is awaiting them who have remained steadfast in God's holy laws. E. Franklin Frazier cites
Charles S. Johnson's statement reinforcing the strength of the black church:

The church is the one outstanding institution of the community over which the negroes themselves exercise control, and because it stands so alone in administering to their own conception of their needs, its function is varied. The religious emotions of the people demand some channel of formal expression, and find it in the church. But more than this, the church is the most important center for face-to-face relations. It is in a very real sense a social institution. It provides a large measure of the recreation and relaxation from the physical stress of life. It is the agency looked to for aid when misfortune overtakes a person. It offers the medium for community feeling, singing together, eating together, praying together, and indulging in the formal expression of fellowship. Above this it holds out a world of escape from the hard experiences of life common to all. It is the agency which holds together the subcommunities and families physically scattered over a wide area. It exercises some influence over social relations, setting up certain regulations for behavior, passing judgements which represent community opinion, censuring and penalizing improper conduct by expulsion. (The Negro In The United States, 350)

The "emotions of the people" and the cultivation of "togetherness" and community echoes the West African survivals stated earlier. Fellowship reinforces togetherness, self-respect, and pride. The black church reminds its parishioners that God is good and His mercy is everlasting; He gives strength and peace of mind to the displaced, disillusioned, and disgruntled. Moreover, the black church reminds the community of their responsibility: that of service to the Lord through His agency in humanity. James Weldon Johnson, as a youth, was reinforced with this precept through a grandmother who displayed, in his words,
"strong will and determination" (19). These traits were cultivated through the Spirituals in the black church. They added the inner emotional dimension of realizing God and His power. Frazier reinforces the notion . . . "it was also true that the Negro found in evangelical faiths -- Baptists and Methodists -- a set of practices and beliefs and an opportunity for emotional expression that were related to his everyday experiences in the new environment" (The Negro In The United States, 335). The Spirituals provided this channel through the church to express this "emotionalism."

The self is empowered and raised with each utterance and phrase. Service, again, was Johnson's call -- strengthened and nourished by his grandmother and the church. He states, "it was during this period that she disclosed her consuming ambition, her ambition for me to become a preacher" (25). As community leader, servant, voice, the black preacher exemplifies direction. He is the servant among servants of the Lord. Highly esteemed, the preacher has the power to convert the sinner into a saint of God. Johnson notes this extremely important service bestowed upon the preacher: "the preacher's exegesis of his text and joining in singing conventional hymns and anthems. The revivalist rants and roars, he exhorts and implores, he warns and threatens. The air is charged. Overlaid emotions come to surface. . . Strapping men break down in agonizing sobs, and emotionally strained women fall out in a rigid
trance. A mourner comes through and his testimony of conversion brings a tumult of rejoicing" (26). West African survivals are here. The "tumult," "agonizing sobs," "conversion," echoed earlier by Herskovits are again emphasized by Johnson in his autobiography. The preacher, therefore, is a leader and a soloist. The power of the preacher, the power of his tool, the voice and song are channels through which the preacher relates the Spiritual to the immediate needs of that "sinner" looking for an escape, an outlet to profess God within. In the following, Johnson relates the music to a wider artistic influence and musical tradition:

I toyed and experimented with at least twenty tentative titles. I narrowed them down to "Listen, Lord; Cloven Tongues; Tongues of Fire; and Trumpets of the Lord, or Trumpeters of the Lord. . . . Suddenly, I lit upon "trombone." The trombone, according to the Standard Dictionary, is: "A powerful brass instrument possessing a chromatic scale enharmonically true, like the human voice or the violin, and hence very valuable in the orchestra." I had found it, the instrument and the word, of just the tone and timbre to represent the old-time Negro preacher's voice. Besides, there were the traditional jazz connotations. So the title became "God's Trombones -- Seven Negro Sermons in Verse." (378)

The preacher's call supported by the response of the choir is heeded with fear and subjection. The preacher is the servant who captures that moment of spiritual revelation. W.E.B. Dubois pointed this out in his essay "Of the faith of
the Fathers" collected as part of the book *The Souls of Black Folk*. He mentions

Three things characterized this religion of the slave, -- the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy. The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist, -- all these he is, and even, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it. The type, of course, varies according to time and place, from the West Indies in the sixteenth century to New England in the nineteenth, and from the Mississippi bottoms to cities like New Orleans or New York. (211)

Therefore, the music stirs through the leader, the preacher. Africanisms are reinforced. Johnson testifies "... it is something akin to majestic grandeur. The music of these songs is always noble and their sentiment is always exalted. Never does their philosophy fall below the highest and purest natures of the heart" (*The Book of American Negro Spirituals*,13). Johnson's grandmother wanted him to grow in this spiritual sentiment; she knew that the church and what it provided was the spiritual food her grandson needed. Frazier adds "nevertheless, the sacred folk songs express awe and wonder of the Negro in regard to life and death and his emotional reactions to the complexity of his existence and his desire to escape from the uncertainties and frustrations of this world" (*The Negro Church in America*, 20). As he presents himself in the autobiography, Johnson
became a witness for the Lord and His revelation through song, preacher, and "mourner."

The following Spiritual, selected by Johnson, embodies this testimony: "Who'll Be A Witness For My Lord."

*My soul is a witness for my Lord,  
You read in de Bible an' you understan'  
Methuselah was de oldes' man  
He lived nine hundred an' sixty nine  
He died an' went to heaven, Lord, in a due time,  
O, Methuselah was a witness for my Lord,  
You read in de Bible an' you understan'  
Samson was de strongest man;  
Samson went out at - a one time,  
An' he killed a thousan' of de Philistine  
Delilah fooled Samson disa we know  
For de Holy Bible tells us so,  
She shaved off his head jus' as clean as you' han',  
An' his strength became de same as any natch'al man.  
O' Samson was a witness for my Lord  (Book of American Negro Spirituals, 130)*

This Spiritual encompasses testimony of the grandeur of God within the human soul. God has all power, omnipotence, and omnipresence. He dwells within and gives comfort and resilience. Johnson shows how the church can be a healing force and sustaining unit for the African American community; how the word, the music, heals, comforts, and restores. Methuselah went to heaven "in due time." The preacher emphasizes that "in due time" Heaven will be revealed. "In due time" a new day of full citizenship will be bestowed upon the African American. The church restores this food of knowledge and Spiritual nourishment to witness God in all that is righteous. Thus, "the highest and purest motives of the heart" are the ways of truth, sincerity, and honesty. Harold Courlander observes that "as for the main
body of religious songs, we find in it a large number of themes projecting the Christian concepts of faith, love, and humility, with considerable emphasis on salvation" (37). Essentially, Johnson’s grandmother knew that there would have to be a purification rite for her grandson to pass in order to serve. Salvation, espoused in Spirituals, connects the soul to truth -- its spiritual source. Salvation witnesses God. "Who’ll Be A Witness For My Lord?" Johnson, here, becomes that witness, like Methuselah and Samson. By testifying to the church’s role in the African American community and telling of the spiritual conversions and emotional rapture of the congregation, Johnson is the witness for the Lord. He reports His miraculous works and edifying inspiration. Johnson’s grandmother knew that by instilling the boy in this grounding, she would prepare him to be that "preacher," leader, and servant, who, with this wisdom, would triumph in the face of failure, and guide and judge in the direction of God’s law and will.

Thus, the witness for the Lord acknowledges the purification rite: "The minister extended his hand to each probationer and welcomed him into the bond of Christian fellowship. When he reached me he paid special tribute to my tender years. I was lifted up, transported. The vision I had recounted came back to reality. I felt myself, like young Samuel, the son of Hannah, dedicated to the service of God" (Along This Way, 27). This grounding also lends itself
in the affirmation of cultural identity by establishing, first, the principles by which to live, and second, the spirit behind these principles. Johnson’s identity is affirmed through testimony. He is the servant whose orders came from on high -- the source of his self. All wisdom and judgment are derived from this source. The black church symbolizes identity through the cultural means of hymns, fellowships, and community. Johnson concurs that "The Negro church, notwithstanding, is the most powerful agency we command for moving forward the race as a mass" (Negro Americans, What Now? 25). It links ties that reflect a common heritage, social status, and commitment. The church purifies the soul to be received by the Lord. It prepares and clothes the "servant" with knowledge and wisdom washed in spiritual revelation -- the Bible. The elders’ responsibility in the church is to make sure this rite has been administered correctly in accordance to Biblical teachings and precepts. Johnson’s baptism into the spiritual world of service armed him with a fortitude that exudes trust. This trait is essential to service. Faith in leadership is the trust that prompts dedication, honesty, and love. Throughout Along This Way the author displays this service for humanity in every endeavor -- examples of which will be explored in this chapter. Too, this training encompasses the Spiritual which intervened within Johnson’s soul in its connection with service to God. "Who’ll be a
witness for the Lord?" Certainly Johnson, through the Spiritual's message, witnessed the Lord in proper guidance he received from his parents and the determination of his grandmother to make him a ward of service.

Thus, the church provided the communal aspect of the Spiritual's message of service. Laurence Levine notes the compassion here: "The spirituals as a testament not only to the perpetuation of significant elements of an older world view but also to the continuation of a strong sense of community" (33). The channel through which this communal performance is established is the choir. A choir is a body of people or parishioners singing the song. The choir rejoices in God through the Spiritual. Its soaring and rapturous jubilee establishes God's grace in the individual and His sacred salvation in one's soul: Only believe, accept, and have faith in Him. Langston Hughes writes "Choral in origin, the spirituals are essentially group songs. Yet at times they may be sung by one man or one woman alone. . . choral accompaniment is in the true tradition of the folk who make of their sorrow and their joys a sharing, of this sharing a togetherness, and of togetherness a common strength" (Liner notes, "O Lord, What A Morning"). As metaphors for service, Spirituals produce the song of the folk, group, and community, and the leader implements their performance in service or duty. This responsibility serves with an uncompromising zeal. The
strength derived from the group (accompaniment) reinforces
cultural identity by telling, naming:

My soul is a witness for my Lord
Methuselah was a witness for my Lord
Samson was a witness for my Lord.

Identity is affirmed by Johnson by acknowledging that he is a "witness for my Lord." This fact in his early development is established as he recalls "I came to that conception of religion and that philosophy of life that are now my guideposts, . . . And, too, because of that experience I became familiar with the Bible. I read it constantly; first to answer my doubts, then to confirm them, and, finally, with an increasing realization that, all in all, the King James version is the greatest book in the world" (31).

James Weldon Johnson was further groomed for a life of service at Atlanta University. He embarked on a journey that was to extend his early spiritual and educational training to a wider and diverse world. Johnson relates "I perceived that education for me meant, fundamentally: preparation to meet the tasks and exigencies of life as a Negro, a realization of the peculiar responsibilities due to my own racial group, and a comprehension of the application of American democracy to Negro citizens" (66). Thus, the preparation for service is paramount here. His Atlanta University education gave him the tools to act upon this calling: "The central idea embraced a term that is now almost a butt for laughter -- 'service.' We were never
allowed to entertain any thought of being educated as 'go-getters'. . . . The ideal constantly held up to us was of education as a means of living, not of making a living' (122). With this firm foundation and communal background, Johnson established himself extending the African American tradition in the Spiritual. Atlanta University gave the young man "a means of living," and the Spiritual, metaphorically, fostered the ideas of service and duty, which became his. Atlanta University's responsibility to the African American community during post-reconstruction was to educate black men and women and, through liberal arts and industrial training, present them with ideas concerning solutions to the race problem. Its practical program of preparation reinforced Johnson's home base of spirituality, dignity, and self identity. Atlanta University created building blocks for students to generate a platform for discussion and debate. Johnson notes "students talked 'race.' It was the subject of essays, orations, and debates. Nearly all that was acquired, mental and moral, was destined to be fitted into a particular system of which 'race' was the center" (66). The attendant forces that buttress racial attitudes and shape its hatred were the focal points of discussion; perhaps its roots could be revealed and solutions put into action.

Atlanta University became this forum of ideas. An informed people is an aware and powerful people. This was
Atlanta University's mission. The University became an extension of the community's foundation: the church. It is interesting to note that the school maintained this spiritual foundation: "The time on Sundays was pretty well filled; preaching in the morning, Sunday school in the afternoon, and prayer meeting at night" (69). Johnson emphasizes in the autobiography that the institution's spirit and resolve is to foster this community tie because of its "purifying" aspect. This is where the concept of the Spirituals were not just musical utterances of sorrow, jubilee; they gave expression to service and became "purifying" aspects in the cause of self identity, determination, and faith. In this sense, the Spiritual and the University achieve a oneness of purpose and meaning. Johnson comments that indeed the Spiritual is the expression of the oppressed and dispossessed. Religious themes are analogies and metaphors for present day circumstances. These themes give answers to contemporary problems. Identity is affirmed here in the Spirituals' origin. Johnson notes "The Negro took as his basic material just his native African rhythms and the King James version of the Bible and out of them created the Spirituals. All of them are by no means religious in a narrow or special sense. All of them are by no means songs of worship, though having a religious origin and usage" (The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 12). These songs were precepts -- strategies
for living. These rules for life form the basis for the individual operating in the role God determines -- not man. God's power has the healing property that transcends racial oppression and converts it -- changes it to opportunity. Johnson's life showed how this change took place. He pressed on past the limitations of Jim Crow to become a lawyer, U.S. consul, and educator.

The Spirituals he heard and became a part of, at home, church, and school, were expressions of his identity that he never lost sight of as a servant to humanity at large and the African American community in particular. Johnson observes "in the Spirituals the Negro did express his religious hopes . . . and his faith and his doubts. In them he also expressed . . . ethical views, and sounded his exhortations." (The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 12).

Along This Way justifies Johnson's testimony here. He has expressed his views on the racial climate -- but always through the dignity of a father, the quiet revolt of a mother, the determination of a grandmother, and the spiritual nourishment and sense of mission through the church and university. Each has contributed to the man who is "climbing Jacob's Ladder." Each step is a step towards the goal of justice and progress. Miles Fisher reports that "Besides giving impressions of real occurrences, spirituals are at the same time contemporary historical documents of these events. Spirituals gave the Negro's side of what
happened to him" (178). We cannot forget their powerful influence over him. In each situation described above, Johnson rehearses the Spiritual and its message of love, duty, and service. He comments:

In many of the Spirituals the Negro gave wide play to his imagination; in them he told his stories and drew his morals therefrom; he dreamed his dreams and declared his visions; he uttered his despair and prophesied his victories; he also spoke the group wisdom and expressed the group philosophy of life. Indeed, the Spirituals taken as a whole contain a record and a revelation of the deeper thoughts and experiences of the Negro in this country for a period beginning three hundred years ago and covering two and a half centuries. (The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 13)

In the following Spiritual "We Am Clim’in’ Jacob’s Ladder," collected by James Weldon Johnson, it subsumes the action and message under a Biblical theme:

We am clim’in’ Jacob’s ladder
Soldiers of de cross.
Ev’ry roun’ goes higher, higher
Soldiers of de cross

The message here is that African Americans as "soldiers of the cross," must move progressively forward in spite of obstacles. James Weldon Johnson can recall how "My Soul’s Been Anchored In De Lord." Prepared to confront a Jim Crow America, Johnson has the "Spiritual" foundation to sing:

In de Lord, in de Lord,
My soul’s been anchored in de Lord;
Befo’ I’d stay in hell one day,
My soul’s been anchored in de Lord.
I’d sing an’ pray myself a way
My soul’s been anchored in de Lord
I’m guiner pray an’ never stop
My soul’s been anchored in de Lord
Until I read de mountain top,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord  
(The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 37).

This collected Spiritual serves as Johnson's armor as he prepares for battle. Along This Way emphasizes that he dedicated his life to searching for solutions and examining the racial problem in the United States. Johnson's earliest experience with racism (the first of three incidents on trains) shaped what was to become his central thought and philosophy on the matter: "In such situations any kind of a Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (89). When he and his friend Ricardo rode in a first class train car to Atlanta, the conductor made it known that they were in trouble if they chose to remain seated in first class. However, Johnson explained the situation in Spanish to his friend; afterwards, when the conductor overheard this, "he punched our tickets and gave them back, and treated us just as he did the other passengers in the car" (65). This incident gave Johnson the strength and fortitude to confront and understand why this problem exists. Only by exploring and defiantly facing a problem a solution can be found. Johnson's theoretical framework was established here: "This was my first impact against race prejudice as a concrete fact. Fifteen years later, an incident similar to the experience with this conductor drove home to me the conclusion that in such situations any kind of a Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (65). Here, a Spiritual
reading would conclude "Nobody Knows De Trouble I see."
Surely Johnson epitomizes the song, its message, its meaning. He notes "In truth, the power to frame the poetic phrases that make the titles of so many of the Spirituals betokens the power to create the songs" (The Book of American Negro Spirituals, 15). Jim Crow creates the situation giving rise to the song.

Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus;
Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Glory hallelujah!
Sometimes I'm up Sometimes I'm down,
Oh, yes, Lord.
Altho' you see me goin' 'long so,
Oh, yes, Lord.
I have my trials here below,
Oh, yes, Lord.
(The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 34)

Johnson, in Along This Way, echoes, sometimes unconsciously, these lyrics. When relating racial experiences dealing with Jim Crow circumstances, the soloist (Individual) relates a personal experience through a communal text. For example, Johnson, in another train incident, was told to move to a "colored" section of a train car, while traveling through Georgia. Johnson and his party purchased first-class tickets, since "Georgia had not yet passed its 'Jim Crow Car' law." Nevertheless, the conductor strongly advised them to move because a telegram was sent to Baxley, Georgia. Johnson recalled noting in the Atlanta Constitution that black ministers were mobbed and humiliated in Baxley for riding in a first-class car. He did not move
but "soon I saw the colored porter of the car. He begged me to come out of the first-class car; he knew that a mob was going to meet the train at Baxley, and he was sure we should be hurt, perhaps killed. His warnings raised my fright to the point where it broke my determination to hold my ground; I went back to my friends and told them what the poster had said, and on my decision we gathered up our luggage and packages and went into the car ahead. This was my first experience with the "Jim Crow Car" (85). Fear and intimidation methods have always been used to maintain African American place through the laws of segregation. Johnson clearly illustrates how violence or the threat thereof can squelch and suppress any semblance of citizenship, equality, or pride. These methods also create humiliation within the victim and inhibit any force to transcend restriction. Johnson, however, has been imbued with the shield of dignity and self identity "anchored" in the family, church, and community. Johnson states "I felt that I was being humiliated. When we passed through Baxley I saw a crowd but no indications of a mob; and I wondered if the colored porter had merely been made a tool of by the white passengers. The more I thought of this, the more I regretted that we had moved" (86). Thus, armed with the "Spiritual" that was anchored in him, Johnson was aware of the many faces racism had worn. He knew the methods by which he was oppressed. Yet, he sings the song, and he is
renewed by the song: "Nobody knows de trouble I see, Nobody knows but Jesus." The trials and tribulations of a racially oppressive environment tend to weaken the spirit; diffuse the spark that is a part of human nature. Yet, Johnson's "soul's been anchored in de Lord." He has something rooted within that transcends the effects of Jim Crow and its attendant forces. This "something special," endowed in the Spiritual, is the power with which the author becomes the servant, defending the dignity and righteousness of a people denied these fundamental human rights. It is interesting to note here that "In this manner, the spirituals were not merely sung, but actually 'composed,' and even the simplest incidents could provide motivation for a new spiritual or could be worked into the framework of an existing one" (Long Black Song, 33). Spirituals, though varied in subject matter and meaning, contain a thematic center that links them. Their theme transcends text, individuality, community. Service is a value.

In relating his Jim Crow experiences, Johnson presents himself wearing the "Spiritual Armor" of equanimity, emotional balance and fortitude, in the face of oppression. He wrote "Let each one of us, let the whole race, be ceaselessly on guard against the loss of spiritual integrity" (Introduction, Along This Way, xxiii). Spiritual nurturing gave him a "protection shield" for the soul. Sandra Wilson wrote "Even though he suffered the
humiliations and physical abuses of jim crowism, he did not consider himself injured so long as he was not jim crowed in soul" (xxiii). The Spiritual becomes his fortress, armor. This is the strength behind the musical tradition: African American survival that transcends bitterness and resentment. Even though the music was born out of these feelings, hope is established in a higher power of justice. He shares "I have since been through a number of experiences with 'Jim Crow.' These experiences have always stirred bitter resentment and even darker passions in my heart. In two instances, however, the ridiculous aspect of the whole business was shown up so glaringly that, notwithstanding the underlying injustice, all sense of indignation was lost in the absurdity of the situation" (86). It is this "absurdity of the situation" Johnson shows in the autobiography as he relates these experiences. In a third incident of racism in a train, he sat in a first class section of a train traveling from Charleston, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida. Knowing that "South Carolina had not yet enacted its separate car law; and all my life I have made it a principle never to 'Jim Crow' myself voluntarily" (86), Johnson was told by the conductor that after reaching the Georgia state line, it was against the law for "white and colored people to ride in the same railroad car" (86). Reluctantly, the author inspected the "colored" section and found two white men there -- "a deputy sheriff and a
dangerously insane man, who was being taken to the asylum" (87). The conductor, being a "reasonable fellow," had to abide by Georgia law and the whites were put in the white section and Johnson in the "colored." He ironically observes that "as I left the car [the white section], there were protests from men and women against the change. The maniac continued his ravings; but both I and the conductor stood squarely by the law" (87). To contrast this experience, Johnson relates how a question of identity reaffirmed his earlier philosophy: toleration of those other than African American. Here, Johnson's theoretical assessment of the race problem is proven.

While traveling from Jacksonville to New York, Johnson sat among several white men who did not think highly of him there among them. Yet, one young man took great interest in Johnson's Panama hat. Promptly, Johnson allowed everyone to inspect it: "When it reached the young man he noticed the Havana -- stamped lining and said to me, '?Habla Ud. espanol?' 'Si, senor,' I answered. Thereupon he and I exchanged several commonplace phrases in Spanish; . . . I said little except in answer to some questions the preacher asked me about conditions in Cuba, where I had not yet been but concerning which I had a good deal of information. The preacher pressed an invitation on me to come and talk about Cuba at his church the next time I happened to be in Tampa" (88-89). The question of identity is a conundrum,
perplexing to those who propagate racial strife and alienation. Here, the white men were much more relaxed, less "threatened" and "imposed upon" when they discovered that Johnson could be of Spanish heritage. This perceptive glance into the roots of racial problems in the United States is very important indeed. Johnson based a recurring theme around it throughout his autobiography. Identity, too, explored by African American thought and scholarship inspects duality -- African and American -- as a problematic racial dynamic. Johnson adds to this dimension, in relation to race in America: "Before we reached Savannah a bond of mellow friendship had been established. My newly made friends got off at Savannah, and I went to bed repeating to myself: In such situations any kind of a Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (89).

Yet, in a similar situation, Johnson encountered the status of identity being placed upon him. He relates the story of how a county Superintendent of Schools in Georgia made an official visit to his classroom. Johnson taught summer school in rural Georgia between his freshman and sophomore years at Atlanta University. When the Superintendent saw the original Spanish version of Don Quijote (Quixote) on Johnson's desk, this made him extremely curious. Johnson relates "In answer to his question I told him that the book was a copy in Spanish of Don Quixote; and I noted the occurrence, in some degree, of the phenomenon to
which I have referred in previous pages" (112). African American identity crisis, according to Johnson, as a recurring theme, shows another dimension to racial thought and animosity. The heartless attitude of denying respect to those whose lives are interwoven in an American identity is a denial of oneself, self-hatred. Perhaps, as was noted earlier, previous slave status is the fine line drawn to separate, deny, and denigrate. The consciousness of America is its African American citizens who reminds America of its past. This is Johnson’s message: To deny a part of you is self hatred. America is biologically, politically, and economically integrated in the African American. The consciousness of America tears at the thought and sight of what has been created of a disturbing past. The African American is that conscience. Johnson subtly illustrates this conscience through the act of tolerance: "The Superintendent heard me conduct a class, and asked a few questions, then addressed the scholars, speaking well of their behavior and progress, not omitting to say some complimentary things about their teacher. We had received a clean bill from the County Superintendent" (112). Does speculation of a Spanish identity influence the Superintendent’s judgment of Johnson’s ability to conduct the classroom? His recurring theme seems to suggest or, at least, give credence to this idea.
This revelation clears up Johnson’s philosophy concerning African American place, status, and citizenship. African American place was restricted by identity. Jim Crow or separate-but-equal laws were created to identify and place. Status, thus, was born out of this identity and place. Restricted in opportunity, position, and equality, African Americans were put under a social category within a prescribed system that classified and confined them to that below their white counterparts. During his three months teaching in rural Georgia, Johnson gained knowledge and first hand experience in race relations: "It was this period that marked the beginning of my psychological change from boyhood to manhood. It was this period which marked also the beginning of my knowledge of my own people as a 'race.' 'I had in the main known my own people as individuals or as groups; and now I began to perceive them clearly as a classified division, a defined section of American society. . . . Here there were no gradations, no nuances, no tentative approaches; what Black and White meant stood out starkly" (119). Through self identity established in song, the African American indeed perceives a homogenous group -- tied together by the common thread of racial oppression. Johnson was influenced and introduced to this self-assessment, evaluation, identity through the Spiritual. 

Along This Way through examples reinforces the concepts of the group -- individuals brought together by a common
bond. The Spiritual -- a self defining strategy -- bolstered with hope and fostered by service -- was a creative attempt by African Americans to overcome a society that defined them in relation to a majority culture and world view. The definition limits, restricts, and inhibits understanding and human progress. The African American had to creatively call upon a power that could change mortal trials and tribulations; a power that through prayer and supplication changed people. Johnson was grounded in this spiritual nourishment. As a result, he knew that ultimately truth would prevail over deception and falsehood. He recounts "But the 'race problem' is paradoxical; and, with all my inexperience, I could not fail to see that this superior status was not always real, but often imaginary and artificial, bolstered up by bigotry and buttressed by the forces of injustice. Nor could I fail to see that what is imaginary artificial, and false cannot eternally withstand actuality and truth" (119). Yet, this relentless hope in the knowledge that truth stands on the foundations of spirituality and that it is buttressed by faith allowed Johnson to look beyond the cosmetics of racism. He found a strength that was instilled in him from boyhood through the beauty of the Spirituals. Their power is in faith; their faith is in God. He said that "It is a theology of survival that allows a people to celebrate the ability to continue the journey in spite of the insidious tentacles of racism
and oppression and to sing, 'It's another day's journey, and I'm glad about it!'" (McClain, x). Johnson's journey into manhood encountered the obstacles of Jim Crow cars and discrimination; yet, in spite of it all, he survived. This is the strength in the African American community: the will and faith to inevitably survive.

Survival is the key element that prompts the individual to serve his or her community. Love, true love, is at its center. The Spirituals laid this foundation in the young Johnson. He recalls "I was anxious to learn to know the masses of my people, to know what they thought, what they felt, and the things of which they dreamed; and in trying to find out, I laid the first stones in the foundation of faith in them on which I have stood ever since" (120). The following words illustrate the power of the Spiritual to influence Johnson's philosophy on race, hardship and oppression. The words and song are his. They are expressed in survival and strength buttressed by faith.

The most vital factor in the future of a race is the power to survive; and the masses have an instinctive knowledge of their possession of that power. Firm confidence is theirs through having survived every degree of hardship and oppression to which any race may be subjected. I saw strong men, capable of sustained labor, hour for hour, day for day, year for year, alongside the men of any race. I saw handsome, deep-bosomed, fertile women. Here, without question, was the basic material for race building. (121)

Johnson is recorder, with a watchful and perceptive eye into this experience. The power of song through metaphor here expresses the will to survive insurmountable odds. It
mourns with pain the sorrows of men and women who labor in the fields and prison camps. Yet, celebration and jubilee are inherent parts of the Spiritual. Each individual victory and progress is a victory and progress for the group. McClain adds that "But the Black experience in America is a multifaceted experience encompassing numerous aspects of an American experience and way of life. No accurate picture of the history of America can be presented without attention to the experience of Black people. No complete picture of Black people can be given without due attention to the Black religious tradition" (McClain, x).

It is in this Black religious tradition that the Spiritual is call upon to deliver the race from the bondage of racism, wearing the face of Jim Crow. This was Johnson's experience presented, however shaped by the purifying aspect of the Spiritual.

Johnson relates another incident where he, his wife Grace Nail, and their guest, a physician from out of town, bought advanced orchestra seats for an operetta playing at one of the Shubert theaters. There, Johnson describes the subtle mask Jim Crow wears: "Inside, each usher we approached was 'very busy,' and we had to find our own seats. After we were seated, I signaled an usher, asking her to bring us programs. She never brought them. A gentleman seated next to me courteously proffered the use of his program" (200). Here, the author shows that racism
challenged the Spiritual because good is daily challenged by evil. This contrast of two social dynamics is the constant tug that he experiences. Moreover, the Spiritual was created to reinforce spirituality where it is constantly being attacked by the social forces of evil. "The spirituals, which speak of life and death, suffering and sorrow, love and judgment, grace and hope, justice and mercy, were born out of this tradition. They are the songs of a people weary at heart. The negro spirituals are the songs of an unhappy people, and yet they are the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas" (McClain 73). This weariness at heart that creates the Spiritual, empowers and replenishes with strength and endurance; thus, the soul is purified by its teachings and this purification is needed to keep the heart and mind intact when confronted with hate. However, this is an ideal. Human emotions tend to, at times, cloud and cover. Knowing this, Johnson sees himself as a soldier in a social battlefield that daily challenges every aspect of the Spiritual. He further expounds on this theme when the above incident at the Shubert Theater was complemented by another. A man from the box office asked him to show his orchestra seat tickets. Johnson refused to actually give the man the tickets; Johnson refused and the man went away. He states

Had I handed him the coupons he would have rushed off with them to the box office, then come back and told us
that there had been a mistake made about the tickets and that we would have to give up our seats. I was determined not to undergo that injustice and humiliation, so I held fast to my coupons. But I was so blind with anger and resentment that I did not actually see the first act. In relation to the whole scheme of life such an experience appears insignificant, but at the moment it is charged with elements of tragedy. (201)

Nevertheless, these experiences did not dampen the "Spiritual" in Johnson. The anger and resentment of being a victim of racism is natural and understandable. Johnson acknowledges the evil of such a social force. However, he also is aware that such a force can, given the opportunity, corrode the purification process of his Spiritual nurturing. The built-up bitterness and hate that result from the attendant forces of racism can psychologically damage the armor of the Spiritual. However, Johnson refuses for this plan of action that characterizes racism to invade this armor, protection. The Spiritual's strength and soul reviving attributes empower the individual to conquer hate and bitterness. The author submits "In the situation into which we are thrown, let each one of us, let the whole race, be ceaselessly on guard against the loss of spiritual integrity. So long as we maintain that integrity we cannot be beaten down, not in a thousand years" (Negro Americans, What Now? 102). Therefore, Johnson is able to say with forthright confidence and faith, that spirituality empowers, "In relation to the whole scheme of life such an experience appears insignificant."
Johnson, in yet another instance, relates his reactions to racism. The Spiritual here also bears witness in Johnson's reactions. He braces against emotions that could potentially destroy the essence of Spiritual teachings. When he, his brother Rosamond, and their partner Bob Cole traveled to San Francisco on the Orpheum Circuit, they stopped at Salt Lake City, Utah to "visit the Mormon Tabernacle and see the town. Upon arrival at the best hotel there, they were refused accommodations in the guise of "I'm sorry but we haven't got a vacant room." However, valid emotional feelings did emerge; though Johnson's "Spiritual" nurture perceptively had pity for Jim Crow. He relates "This statement, which I know almost absolutely to be false, set a number of emotions in action: humiliation, chagrin, indignation, resentment, anger; but in the midst of them all I could detect a sense of pity for the man who had to make it, for he was, to all appearances, an honest, decent person" (204). The Spiritual teaches forgiveness, humaneness, and compassion. Even, afterwards, when Johnson's group stopped at a restaurant, he did not allow hate to enter his heart to corrode the firm foundation established there. In spite of humiliation, he rises above temptation: "When we entered it was rather crowded, but we managed to find a table and sat down. There followed that hiatus, of which every Negro in the United States knows the meaning. At length, a man in charge came over and told us
without any pretense of palliation that we could not be served. We were forced to come out under the stare of a crowd that was conscious of what had taken place" (205). The attribute evident here is that of fortitude.

In the "overall scheme of things," Johnson maintains his dignity knowing that he is "lovin' at God's command."

This God consciousness integrated in the Spiritual overcomes indignation and humiliation. The following lyrics (Gimme Yo' Han') reduce the forces of hate with that of love.

O, gimme yo' han', Gimme yo' han'
All I want is de love o' God;
Gimme yo' han', gimme yo' han,'
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'.
You say you're aimin' for de skies,
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'
Why don't you quit yo'tellin lies,
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'
You say de Lord has set you free
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'
Why don't you let yo' neighbor be
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'
You seek God's grace but don't seek right,
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'
Dey pray in de day, but none at night,
You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'.
(The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 86)

These lyrics integrate God in everything we do in life. "You mus' be lovin' at God's comman'" is the message. It calls out to all hypocrites: "Why don't you quit yo' tellin' lies," "You seek God' grace but don't seek right," "Dey pray in de day, but none at night." These lyrics illustrate the purification process the Spirituals engender in the soul.
It is important that in order to act on God's command, one must have a clean heart and righteous conscience. Johnson shows through the hotel clerk and restaurant owner, who fail morally through racist hate and consciousness, that he overcomes their failures because he's "lovin' at God's command." The Spiritual is the uplifting attribute in Johnson. He rises above racism which is small in the "overall scheme of things." "Why don't you let yo' neighbor be" directly calls attention to the hotel clerk and restaurant owner. This Spiritual reading would suggest that Jim Crow will be judged in the court of God's law. It is essential "you mus' be lovin' at God's comman'." Johnson, Johnson, and Cole's role in the overall scheme of things is to abide by this law when faced with the masks Jim Crow wears. Johnson relates

We smoked and talked over the situation we were in, the situation of being outcasts and pariahs in a city of our own and native land. Our talk went beyond our individual situation and took in the common lot of Negroes in well-nigh every part of the country, a lot which lays on high and low the constant struggle to reverse their hearts and wills against the unremitting pressure of unfairness, injustice, wrong, cruelly, contempt, and hate. If what we felt had been epitomized and expressed in but six words, they would have been: A hell of a "my country". (205)

Through the characteristics and attributes of the Spirituals, they are able to "reverse their hearts and wills" against racism. The God consciousness of the Spiritual becomes part of their posterity. Hope is evident.
Johnson contrasts the racial hate and hypocrisy of Salt Lake City, Utah and even New York to the humane atmosphere of San Francisco, California. He writes:

I was delighted with San Francisco. Here was a civilized center, metropolitan and urbane. With respect to the Negro race, I found it a freer city than New York. I encountered no bar against me in hotels, restaurants, theaters, or other places of public accommodation and entertainment. . . . I moved about with a sense of confidence and security, and entirely from under that cloud of doubt and apprehension that constant hangs over an intelligent Negro in every Southern city and in a great many cities of the North. (206, 207)

San Francisco, as a part of the United States, is a model city -- hope for what can be a reality. This hope and illustration are the essential part of Spiritual understanding and testimony. In the overall scheme of things God is the supreme being -- the foundation of and for righteousness. Yet, the forces of evil, here characterized by Jim Crow laws and attitudes, are the constraints that challenge the sense of humanity and love. This is where the Spiritual undergoes modification, illustrating the good and the bad. Johnson informs that "It is also true that many of these songs have been modified and varied as they have been sung by different groups in different localities" (The Book of American Negro Spirituals, 21). As in San Francisco, the author's experience in Paris proved the faith his song heritage has in humanity through the agency in God.

Paris, France in the early twentieth century had been perceived as a safe haven for artistic and human freedom. A
striking contrast to Jim Crow America, Paris was the city or locale that allowed the African American who had something artistic to give or impart to be a man or woman -- a human being without the clouds of inferiority and racial hate. 

Johnson exclaims

From the day I set foot in France, I became aware of the working of a miracle within me. I became aware of a quick readjustment to life and to environment. I recaptured for the first time since childhood the sense of being just a human being. I was suddenly free; free from a sense of impending discomfort, insecurity, danger; free from the conflict within the man -- Negro dualism and the innumerable maneuvers in thought and behavior that it compels; free from the problem of the many obvious or subtle adjustments to a multitude of bans and taboos; from from special scorn, special tolerance, special condescension, special commiseration; free to be merely a man. (209)

Johnson takes a comprehensive and international look at the race problem in terms of the African American experience in the United States and France. Throughout Along This Way Johnson’s perceptive look into the universality of race guides him in his quest for understanding and comprehending human personality: human emotions and conscience. The only way of dissecting the problem is through an international perspective. A regional or national look restricts history and fact. Johnson realized this and sought understanding -- internationally. Too, the Spiritual captures the universality of God in humanity; perhaps, Johnson saw himself as a better servant to humanity if he searched the universality of the race problem as it related to the African American in the United States. He observes
Out of it all, the truth that come home most directly to me was the universality of the race and color problem. Negroes in the United States are prone, and naturally, to believe that their problem is 'the' problem. The fact is, there is a race and color problem wherever the white man deals with darker races. The thing unique about the Negro problem in the United States, a uniqueness that has its advantages and disadvantages, is that elsewhere the problem results from the presence of the White man in the midst of a darker civilization, and in the United States, from the presence of the Negro in the midst of a White civilization. (398)

In exploring identity and race, Johnson makes a keen observation into the ramifications of black and white in America and the world outside America. However, whenever American influence is strong, unfortunately, race attitudes are similar to America's. Johnson here also acknowledges the diaspora in the world. The "Darker races" constitute most of the world's population. However, the minority occidental peoples control and exert social, political and economic power in the world. The unique situation African Americans hold is their place within this social, political power. To survive and exert influence within this social-political structure and system is a grand feat. Such accomplishment, to a degree, in a relatively short amount of time after manumission, attracts all those who are oppressed. Can Johnson here be suggesting that the eyes of the world are on the African American? Does the African American hold secretly and discreetly a position of prestige in the world's eye? Such a position can truly inspire and create a sense of self identity too powerful to be denied.
This global perspective into race conjures up new dimensions into self in relation to the world. Johnson states:

[African American] "self-confidence may be increased by only looking around him and noting what a mess the white race has made of civilization. . . . He can at any time negatively increase his own racial self-esteem by taking an objective observation of the brutality, meanness, lawlessness, graft, crowd hysteria and stupidity of which the white race is capable" (410). Thus, a kind of moral change or revolution is needed to create a world climate for all people to be respected and treated justly in the court of human kindness and humanity. Romantic or ideal, the quest for racial and ethnic peace must come from this revolution.

Revolution is defined as a complete change, overthrow, political and/or social. As this relates particularly to the African American, Johnson proposes "The only kind of revolution that would have an immediately significant effect on the American Negro's status would be a moral revolution -- an upward push given to the level of ethical ideas and practices. And that, probably, is the sole revolution that the whole world stands in need of" (411). This is the impetus of the Spiritual. It upholds moral values and character and defies evil with the capacity to love. This revolutionary component of the Spiritual is its power to defy through "secular codes" of resistence. The African
American did not just accept his or her fate in this world and looked for a reward in the after life. *Along This Way* testifies to this fact.

Through Johnson's knowledge of the race problem in the United States, he was able to put the problem into perspective. *Along This Way* documents his experience. That is, his reaction to racial attitudes and actions was not wrought by emotional responses. He saw the stupidity and absurdity of the various faces of Jim Crow. For example, while principal of Stanton, which, through his efforts became a high school, he visited and was allowed to observe various classes at a Jacksonville grammar school. He states "my self-introductions were met with varying degrees of graciousness, politeness, embarrassment, and stiffness. Most of the pupils exhibited undisguised curiosity. I went away feeling that I had gained a good deal" (126). The Spiritual enhances a sense of self that transcends mortal pain and pressure. It gives the soloist, as well as the choir, a sense of pride and hope — all ingredients that endow Johnson with the missionary spirit. In the Spiritual, "Zekiel Saw De Wheel", Johnson can rely on the faith that undergirds the rocks of dignity and duty.

'Zekiel saw de wheel of time
Wheel in de middle of a wheel
Ev'ry spoke was human kind
Wheel in de middle of a wheel
'Way up yon'der on de mountain top,
Wheel in de middle of a wheel
My Lord spoke an' de chariot stop,
Wheel in de middle of a wheel.
'Zekiel saw de wheel,  
'way up in de middle of de air,  
De big wheel run by faith,  
Little wheel run by de grace of God;  
Wheel widin' a wheel,  
'Way in de middle of de air.  
(The Second Book of Negro Spiritual, 144)

Thus, service "run by faith" becomes an inextricable part of the man, fostered in boyhood.

James Weldon Johnson's service and leadership roles in the African American community and the United States Government were prepared by his service in education. The Spiritual, of course, sustains and imbues these roles. In his ambition to become a lawyer, Johnson was not without challenge and racism. The Spiritual reinforced his determination to succeed and overcome obstacles. His examining committee consisted of Judge R. M. Call, a "fair man," E. J. L'Engle, Major W. B. Young, and Duncan U. Fletcher. The author notes that "I determined to let nothing interfere with the working of my mind. I concluded that I would need to know all that I knew, and know it on the instant. So I kept my attention focused as steadily as I could on my examining committee, before whom I was seated six, or eight feet away" (142). His strength of mind is set forth. Earlier, Johnson noted that the African American must never submit to Jim Crow laws because, in effect, he or she would spiritually fail. This is the essence of the Spiritual: its pride, strength, faith, and its uncloaked righteousness. Johnson, too, maintains that "Each time we
break through or sweep away discrimination we make it easier for the next time and the next one. This is a struggle in which time after time we are compelled to yield ground; let us never yield ground spiritually” (Negro Americans, What Now?, 103). This force of spirit gave Johnson the confidence and will to surmount barriers and aspire toward personal fulfillment (success). The following passage describes the author’s circumstance in the examination room: “The examination started. The questions were fired at me rapidly; little time being allowed for consideration. Sometimes the same question would be camouflaged and fired a second time. As the examination proceeded I gained confidence” (143). Prepared to "Walk In Jerusalem Jus' Like John" Johnson goes forth into the vanguard of service. He displays its Spiritual message: faith in God, who rules; faith in self that rises in spirituality -- faith to guide and serve.

I want to be ready --
To walk in Jerusalem jus’ like John.
John said de city was jus’ four square
He declared he’d meet me dere;
John! Oh John! what do you say?
Dat I’ll be dere in the comin day
Peter was preachin' at Pentacost,
He was endowed wid de Holy Ghost... 
Walk in Jerusalem jus’ like John. 
(The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 58)

The author acts as soloist. He walks confidently and forthrightly into "Jerusalem" as an attorney-at-law for the State of Florida. Johnson proudly proclaims "Judge Call bade me rise and swore me in as a counselor, attorney-at-
law, and solicitor in the courts of the State of Florida" (144). He attains his ambition and walks the steep steps that takes him there. The Spiritual was this guard of defense. As an attorney, and later admitted to the Florida State Supreme Court, Johnson indeed "Walked into Jerusalem jus' like John." He was in a position of service, fostered by the power of Spiritual sentiment. Interestingly, Lawrence Levine states that "for black Americans as for other minority groups in the society, the socialization process increasingly became a dual one: an attempt to learn to live both within and outside the group" (153). Johnson’s Spiritual background gave him the educational means to survive outside the black community. In becoming a lawyer, he had to make a journey outside of his community and successfully survive; at the same time he had to successfully be readmitted within the social group. This is the duality of identity of the African American who has the confidence and determination to "walk in Jerusalem jus' like John." And, too, this is the historical and cultural legacy and heritage with which the African American had to rely upon, retain, and survive. Melville Herskovits noted that

The realistic appraisal of the problem attempted here follows the hypothesis that this group, like all other folk who have maintained a group identity in this country, have retained something of their cultural heritage, while at the same time accommodating themselves, in whatever measure the exigencies of the historical situation have permitted, to the customs of the country as a whole. (145)
James Weldon Johnson expressed in the autobiography that he felt a responsibility to serve and indeed be that "leader" in the black community for the rights of justice and full citizenship. However, progress sometimes means leaving and separating, physically not spiritually, from loved ones. Johnson steadily relies on the purification process (clear conscience and heart) of the Spiritual to make decisions that will benefit both himself and the black community in general: "Someone has said that a large part of the whole business of life is good guessing. That someone was, I think, pretty close to the truth. I had a tearful parting from my mother when I carried out my purpose of returning to New York. I reassured her with the promise that I should come back to Jacksonville as often as I possibly could. Toward the end of the summer of 1914 Grace and I started north" (301).

In New York (1916), Johnson was called to serve by J. E. Spingarn and W. E. B. DuBois' invitation to become a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Explicitly, DuBois scribbled "Do come." At this point in American history, Johnson says that the call to serve was a crucial stage in the development and progress of the black community. At no other time has the opportunity been given for radical social, economic, and political changes. He states

The conference was held at a time when the fundamental rights of the Negro were in a state of flux. At no
time since the days following the Civil War had the Negro been in a position where he stood to make greater gain or sustain greater loss in status. The great was in Europe, its recoil on America, the ferment in the United States, all conspired to break up the stereotyped conception of the Negro's place that had been increasing in fixity for forty years, and to allow of new formations. (308)

Johnson knew "Many Thousan' Gone." The African American was in the midst of a Jim Crow society where lynchings were common. Laws were enacted to support such "justice." Yet, in the face of it all, "Many Thousan' Gone." Johnson notes "In the whole South, the home of the overwhelming masses of the race, he [African American] had been completely disfranchised, segregated, and 'Jim Crowed' in nearly every phase of life, and mobbed and lynched and burned at the stake by the thousands" (310). Again, the old Negro Spiritual echoes: "Many thousan' Gone." Johnson's spiritual foundation and nurture would not allow him to sit in a safe sinecure and not feel compelled to go to battle for righteousness: Civil rights, political rights, citizenship rights -- human rights. He reports that the NAACP offered him this opportunity. His Spiritual training and grounding are called forth.

No mo' auction block for me.
No mo', No mo',
No mo' auction block for me.
No mo', No mo',
No mo' driver's lash for me.
No mo', No mo',
No mo' driver's lash for me.
No mo' pint o' salt for me.
No mo', No mo',
No mo' pint o' salt for me.
Many Thousan' Gone.
These lyrics reinforce self respect, dignity, and the ability to stand steadfast against those forces that challenge these values. Hence the "revolutionary" spirit is presented in the lyrics: "No Mo," "No Mo," "No Mo."

Coupled with the new presidential administration of Woodrow Wilson that supports Jim Crow/racial discrimination, Johnson is "climbing Jacob's ladder, Soldier of the Cross."

He began to work as field secretary for the NAACP in December 1916. Initially, the author was surprised at the offer; nevertheless, the "child of destiny" accepted:

The offer was a genuine surprise. I had not received the slightest intimation of its likelihood; nevertheless, under my surprise I was aware that what had come to me was a line with destiny. Out of such tenuous stuff had it come -- the unspoken reactions between me and two other men, J. E. Spingarn and W. E. B. DuBois -- that it could not have been other than the resultant of those mysterious forces that are constantly at work for good or evil in the life of every man. (309)

Therefore, attuned to "spiritual" forces that, if allowed, guide, and direct, Johnson is at peace with himself and his mission. It is his philosophy that "regardless of what might be done for black America, the ultimate and vital part of the work would have to be done by black America itself; and that to do that work black America needed an intelligent program" (315). The answer: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "In this organization, Johnson could "awaken black America, awaken it to a sense of
its rights. . . " (314). Earlier in 1904, President Roosevelt appointed Johnson as U. S. Consul at Puerto Cabello, Venezuela and later Corinto, Nicaragua. His consular duties extended the service metaphor. He represented the whole of the United States.

The author's crowning achievement, artistically, was "Lift Ev'ry Voice And Sing." Notwithstanding his success as a lyricist and librettist with the Johnson, Johnson (Rosamond), and Cole (Bob Cole) trio, writing early Broadway musicals, Johnson's words and Rosamond's music to this song capture the quintessential sentiment of the African American Community. I submit that it is a Spiritual in every sense. The song fosters hope where there is weariness, and it connects a cultural identity where there is separation and chaos. Essentially, the lyrics and music of "Lift Ev'ry Voice And Sing" pull together that which identifies the African American -- spiritually, culturally, and historically. The song celebrates African American customs and heritage:

Lift every voice and sing, Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of liberty  
Let our rejoicing rise High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun  
Let us march on till victory is won.  
(First Verse, Copyright Edward B. Marks Music Corporation)
Note how this exhibits traits of the Spiritual images of singing, values of faith and hope, and religious images of rejoicing, and images of war. Originally the author, as songwriter, wanted to write a poem in celebration of Lincoln’s birthday. However, something within him compelled him to express a spiritual message; one that identifies and unifies. Johnson recalls "We planned, better still, to have it sung by schoolchildren -- a chorus of five hundred voices" (154). It is especially noted here that children were to sing the song. Children are posterity -- hope for the future. Johnson's message was inspired by this hope. Buell Gallagher observes "It's all there, in the stanzas of 'Lift Ev'ry Voice': the suffering, the bitterness, the storms, the rod, the weary years, the silent tears, the sacrifice of our fathers in order that we may stand -- oh yes! stand in soaring hope, valiant for the right. The 'ever-ready rainbow' does not distort the truth it conveys" (121). Certainly Johnson captures, most creatively, the pulse of the African American community. As the official song of the NAACP, "Lift Ev'ry Voice And Sing" tells the American story. The organization's mission was built on the song's foundation of strength, unity, and spirituality. The song has the stirring capability to bridge unity. Lawrence Levine notes that "Living in the midst of a hostile and repressive white society, black people found in language an important means of promoting and maintaining a sense of
group unity and cohesion" (153). Johnson, after creating "Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing," is inspired by the creation. His spiritual connection is felt: "I could not keep back the tears, and made no effort to do so. I was experiencing the transports of the poet’s ecstasy. Feverish ecstasy was followed by that contentment -- that sense of serene joy -- which makes artistic creation the most complete of all human experiences" (155). Adopted around the country as the "Negro National Hymn (Anthem)," the Johnson brothers song was and still remains a source of inspiration in the African American community. The author truly had created something that stimulated the Spiritual born deep inside. The man is whole. He assumes all boyhood nurturing in the creation of the man -- the song. William McClain shares a similar observation regarding the Spiritual. He reports "A very real part of the worship of Black people is the songs of Zion. Singing is as close to worship as breathing is to life. These songs of the soul and of the soil have helped to bring a people through the torture chambers of the last three centuries. They reflect the truth of an old African dictum: ‘The Spirit will not descend without song’" (ix). Heritage, thus, connects within the song. "Lift Ev’ry Voice And Sing" is a Spiritual. The author made sure that "in the stanza the American Negro was historically and spiritually immanent" (155). The song becomes creator. It instills a power that is reinforced by a supreme spirit. The spirit
descended through the song and enthralled the singer/soloist, creator/lyricist with an undeniable truth and beauty — fruits of the Spiritual. He is again servant to humanity through song: "Nothing that I have done has paid me back so fully in satisfaction as being the part creator of this song. I am always thrilled deeply when I hear it sung by Negro children. I am lifted up on their voices, and I am also carried back and enabled to live through again the exquisite emotions I felt at the birth of the song" (156). Johnson's "exquisite emotions" are metaphors for the spirit. Indeed, the spirit descended upon him through the song. The author connects the Spiritual with the spirit that was instilled and would forever live and be a part of him.

James Weldon Johnson's life in Along This Way embodied the Spiritual. It led him beyond and above the boundaries of Jacksonville, Florida. The Spiritual gave him the strength, dignity, and armor against a society that challenged him. This, the song's purification strategy, prepared for him a heart that first received all humanely and then judged by their actions. Yet, forgiveness and pity were its attributes, its values. What is the Spiritual? How was it composed? The Spiritual is a language expressing the dreams and aspirations of an oppressed people -- created by the African American. In an early collection of Spirituels, a slave was asked how was the Spiritual composed. He responded: "'Dey make 'em, sah. . . I'll tell
you, it's dis way. My master call me up, and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it, and is sorry for me. When day came to de praise meeting dat night dey sing about it. . . And dey work it in -- work it in, you know, till they get it right; and dat's de way' (Allen, xviii). "And dat's de way" the Spiritual was born. Johnson wrote "Lift Ev'ry voice And Sing" in a similar manner. The Spiritual's most endearing and lasting quality was its ability to instill the Will to serve in the author. A part of service is responsibility. Johnson's family and community, through the Spiritual, grounded in him the love of self, community, and humanity. As a man, the author accepted the responsibility to serve humanity. Moreover, he desired to serve. The costs and benefits were too great. He notes "If the Negro is made to fail, America fails with him. If America wishes to make democratic institutions secure, she must deal with this question right and righteously" (412). Johnson's call to serve was, in essence, a plea for help: help save America -- help secure and insure humanity.

A musical interpretation of his life as he depicts himself in Along This Way is an homage to the Spiritual -- the old traditional Negro Spiritual. The author wrote that "It is safe to say that for many generations the Spirituals will be kept alive as folk songs. . . They possess the qualities and powers. . ." (The Second Book of Negro
Spirituals, 22). Indeed, these "qualities and powers" give life -- sustain and rejuvenate. The Spirituals are the life-blood that restores spirituality: "To do this, he needs to be able at times to touch God; let the idea of God mean to him whatever it may" (414). Thus, the Spirituals were created to meet immediate and practical needs of the oppressed. Yet, there was hope in the future -- in posterity. Moreover, they nurtured a lifestyle; they planted character and values -- armor against an often hostile, racist society named Jim Crow. Johnson was well fortified to face the challenge: "The pledge to myself which I have endeavored to keep through the greater part of my life is: I Will Not Allow One Prejudiced Person Or One Million Or One Hundred Million To Blight My Life. I Will Not Let Prejudice Or Any Of Its Attendant Humiliations And Injustices Bear Me Down To Spiritual Defeat. My Inner Life Is Mine, And I Shall Depend And Maintain Its Integrity Against All The Powers Of Hell" (Negro Americans, What Now?, 103). Thus, herein lies the Spiritual's lasting "qualities and powers." James Weldon Johnson's life presented in his autobiography became a part of them.
"Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural. There is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle. So every man’s spice-box seasons his own food" (45). The preceding quote by Zora Neale Hurston in Chapter 5 "Figure and Fancy" of her autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road (1942) encompasses the essence and character of Zora Neale Hurston. Novelist, folklorist, educator, and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston used these gifts and saw the world from her own creative angle, and she in turn was seen from many different perspectives. The gift of self expression was hers. The unabridged Hurston was dynamic, individual, independent. Hurston’s improvisational strategy in life indeed seasoned her own food. Her "spice-box" was the free spirit of adventure found in interpretation and improvisation. Given the incentive to "jump at de sun" by her mother, Hurston aspired to and achieved the status of writer. Often known as the grandmother to modern African American women writers,
Hurston's voice is heard in her posterity. Alice Walker's work has been influenced by Hurston. Walker, who erected a marker at Hurston's unkempt grave, ignited the recent popularity and recognition of the importance of Hurston's work. Scholarship, in African American and American literature, and folklore studies have greatly benefited from the work of Hurston. Jazz, as a social dynamic that interprets and improvises, characterizes Zora Neale Hurston as a Jazz performer, trying to survive in a society that often denied her the full opportunities accorded citizenship. As a Jazz performer, Hurston rebelled against what was considered the norm in achieving goals. Her community lambasted her socio/political performance. Hurston, the Bebop figure, initiated this Bop into a style and character that uniquely identifies Hurston, the unabridged Jazz/Bop artist. Though her major writing was done before the bop era of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie (the 1940s), she was a precursor in literature of a musical movement because the same spirit of innovation in improvisation influenced her and the bop musicians.

Jazz strategy as a survival tool has been presented, along with Blues, a mode of consciousness that creates and determines Jazz interpretation, as an identifiable mode of expression that signifies and affirms a cultural link. Hurston is the daughter of ancestors whose cries and pains created unique American cultural expressions and ongoing
dynamic traditions: Spirituals, Blues, Jazz. The rich musical tradition, an American original and a uniquely African American art form, is a way of life, a survival strategy for the African American. Zora Neale Hurston used this art in the Jazz mode. She states "I must tell the tales, sing the songs, do the dances, and repeat the raucous sayings and doings of the Negro farthest down. . . they are utterly sincere in living" (Dust Tracks 129). Hurston reinforces the Africanisms mentioned in Chapter I by acknowledging a "primitive" response to Jazz music. She participates in the creative act of Jazz expression. Robert Hemenway cites her excitement compared to a white companion's response to Jazz performance. He states:

Her response comes not only as a function of race, differentiating her from a white companion, but also as an archetype of history. Jazz, she implies, touches the racial memory of Africa: "This orchestra grown rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen -- follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the work yeeeeowee! I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something -- give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly."

(75-76)

She signifies, interprets, improvises, explores, and discovers. These characteristics define what is uniquely Jazz, what is uniquely Zora Neale Hurston.
Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography gives the reader proof positive that she lived Jazz through its winding, interpretive means of expression. Often contradictory and unassuming, Hurston reaffirmed her cultural identity through the Jazz mode. Essentially, her gifts of expression were the tools that effectively made Hurston a foremost and highly regarded researcher in her field. The autobiography is just one of those tools she used to perform the acts of omission, subtlety, and genius. Maya Angelou suggests a Jazz strategy when she says "there is a saying in the Black community that advises: 'If a person asks you where you're going, you tell him where you've been. That way you neither lie nor reveal your secrets'" (xii). This appears to have been the quintessential Hurston. She lived a complex and often brutal life. In terms of literary recognition and status, Hurston achieved a level of prominence as a folklorist, anthropologist, and novelist. However, a greater degree of recognition in these areas were accorded her posthumously. Hurston indeed lived the Jazz of Maya Angelou's statement. A testament to this observation was noted in a biographical sketch: "Zora Neale Hurston was an 'outrageous woman' who shattered all concepts of what women were supposed to do. A complex, controversial, flamboyant individual, she put her multifaceted career as an artist before all else. It was probably the effort to maintain this defiant stance that eventually led to Hurston's
decline" (Logan 340). The mystical evasiveness that stirs around Hurston's life arises from her eccentricity. Namely, Zora Neale Hurston had to defy the odds of failure through an uncommon means. We will see how the young Zora was inspired by family and neighbors to go beyond boundary. If she was eccentric, this defined her. It allowed her to become that unique individual who would stand out, however posthumously, as a giant.

Autobiography, novels, stories, folklore, and scholarship were Hurston's means of delivering the Jazz performance. Dust Tracks presents the truth, if not the facts, that was essentially Hurston. If the truth, here, is characterized by confusion, chaos, and calamity, so be it. Robert Hemenway agrees that "the autobiography does reaffirm the vital source of her fiction... And if the book displays Hurston's folksiness, it does so as an integral part of a complex personality" (277). However, the abridged Hurston presented in autobiographical prose reflects editorial concerns and Hurston's own acknowledgment of her white audience. Hemenway cites:

Her total career, not her autobiography, is the proof of her achievement and the best index to her life and art. Only when considered in that total context can the book be properly assessed, for it is an autobiography at war with itself. Apparently written self-consciously with a white audience in mind, probably because of editorial suggestions, it illustrates the contradictions, ambivalence, and disappointment of Zora Hurston's personal and professional life in the early 1940s. As Zora admitted, "I did not want to write it at all, because it is too hard to reveal one's inner self,"
a remark that refers to both personal disclosure and the problems of autobiographical technique. (277-278)

These are the restrictions, psychological and professional, Zora Neale Hurston had to confront in writing *Dust Tracks*. Therefore, the abridged Hurston is presented in autobiographical prose. However, I shall show the unabridged Hurston reflecting Jazz improvisation in *Dust Tracks*. The music reveals her cultural identity. In a general sense, African American autobiography documents victory in spite of defeats. Robert Hemenway moreover states that

Black American autobiography is a unique genre. Black autobiography usually are people who have forged their identity despite attempts to deny them a sense of personal worth; the tension between individual and stereotype, between what one thinks of himself and what white society expects him to be, grants special energy to the autobiographical prose. The author, having escaped the self-description and self-defeat that whites have hoped to impose, speaks from a position of privilege and responsibility; the autobiographical account is presumed to contain both lessons for black people -- how to combat racism, how to affirm the self and indictments for whites. (278)

The real Zora Neale Hurston is revealed. The music is here. The Jazz that is born out of such an experience is here. Zora Neale Hurston -- the true Zora Neale Hurston -- is revealed here through the music. Jessie Carney Smith says "Hence, unlike any other black American autobiography, *Dust Tracks* consists of an intricate interplay of the introspective personal engagement expected of an autobiography and the self-effacement expected of cultural
descriptions and explications associated with ethnography" (546). Ironically Hurston was not self effacing in her cultural descriptions, for example, in Mules and Men. As in Dust Tracks, Hurston’s personal description and introspection of Black culture and folklore is revealed:

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seemingly acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner 'Get out of here!' We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the prober enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. (Mules and Men, 2)

This description is an illustration of improvisation -- the Jazz in African American culture, seen through the eyes of a folklorist. We shall see later where Hurston uses the improvisational means of signifying to identify an ethnographic print or picture she represents reflecting her place in Eatonville, Florida, the African American community, and America. She was a wanderer since childhood. Therefore, we shall also see how she looked at her life from an international scheme.

The music inextricably weaves into the autobiography. The Jazz link here creates controversy, criticism, and complexity. Dust Tracks on a Road is a Jazz performance.
This interpretive study or link is revealed in each chapter and grows with the mind and body of Zora Neale Hurston.

The idea of interpretation allows the player of jazz to perform the music the way his/her consciousness and soul interpret it and not necessarily the way the composer, if any, specifically intended it. Jazz performers may choose the tempo, dynamic, and the rhythm they feel best fits their own understanding of the music, and also decide how much to ornament the original melody. . . . This process is the true essence of jazz, from which the act of jazz improvisation has evolved. (Kynaston 2)

Hurston interpreted through her own unique way of seeing her own life. She is both composer and interpreter. We shall see that from childhood to heralded author, Zora Neale Hurston's "spice-box" was peppered with a dignity, determination, and direction that her world largely did not give her. America failed her. She did not fail America. A testament to this fact is seen in the revitalized study of her life and work. Genius lives on beyond acceptance, greatness is its child. Humanity rises above all else. Zora Neale Hurston possessed all three.

Although there is no evidence that Zora Neale Hurston heard Jazz as a child, the strategies of Jazz were part of her cultural upbringing. However subtle, Jazz developed within young Zora as incremental "riffs"; that is, a word, phrase, observation, or feeling contributed to Hurston's lifelong Jazz strategy of survival in America. She claims "I picked up reflections of life around me with my own instruments, and absorbed what I gathered according to my
inside juices" (45). Thus, like the Jazz musician, Hurston used her "own instruments" to interpret life around her. The "inside juices" stir the emotions and intellect that often guide and direct. As a result, through this Jazz improvisation, a resolution is attained. A goal is achieved. Hurston the young wanderer becomes Hurston the accomplished writer. Every creation has a beginning, middle, and end. Like this universal truth, Hurston in *Dust Tracks* presented her story. She states: "Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place had their say" (1). Indeed, she is the sum total of all she has experienced. Time and place -- beginning, middle, and end -- identifies Hurston.

The Zora Neale Hurston story began in Eatonville. Born on January 7, 1891 or 1901 (there are still some doubts about her actual year of birth), the fifth of eight children to John and Lucy Potts Hurston, Zora was inspired by her parents. She recalls her father's wandering spirit that enabled him, like her, to "seek and see." "It was after his marriage that my father began to want things. Plantation life began to irk and bind him. His over-the-creek existence was finished. What else was there for a man like him? He left his wife and three children behind and went out to seek and see" (9). Later elected three term mayor of the all black town of Eatonville, Zora's father's ambition
was her precept. Ironically, John Hurston’s actions did not follow his later disposition. He tried to break Zora’s spirit or "kill me in the attempt." Her father knew that whites were against the energy and fire for life that often engendered ambition within the African American. This temperament in post-reconstruction or Jim Crow America was indeed dangerous for the African American if publically known or acknowledged. Lynchings and other sorts of violence and intimidation were used to squelch the fire, inhibit personal and community progress. However, Lucy Potts Hurston instilled the perpetual flame of intellectual growth, resiliency, and dignity. She told her children to "jump at de sun," to go forward toward their goals amid the mountains and cliffs. The stuff that makes one aspire and achieve is the stamp or badge he or she will eternally wear. That stuff, what is uniquely Hurston, gives her life today. Hurston’s parents, therefore, as she recalled, instilled the riffs that were to become strategies for surviving a Jim Crow America. Indeed, Zora Neale Hurston was tutored well. Thus, her testimony revealed: "The strangest thing about it was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go. I would wander off in the woods all alone, following some inside urge to go places. . . . I don’t know why it never occurred to her [mother] to connect my tendency with my father, . . . . That should have given her a sort of hint. Some children are
just bound to take after their fathers in spite of women's prayers" (22, 23). The Jazz here was born from a father's ambition, a mother's vision, and a baby's steps.

The beginning of the Zora Neale Hurston story lays the foundation of the "travel dust" that left Hurston's "Dust tracks on a Road." The sprinkles of wander, adventure, knowledge became the incentives that led Hurston far beyond the confines of Eatonville. The result: stories, folklore, truth. Maya Angelou confirms "Zora Neale Hurston chose to write her own version of life in Dust Tracks on a Road. Through her imagery one soon learns that the author was born to roam, to listen and to tell a variety of stories" (vii). The truth of Hurston's life can be found in the Jazz schematic. Intimated earlier, the Jazz schematic echoes Angelou's assessment: through the author's imagery, she was born to roam, to listen, to tell. The author admits this drive. The drive tells the Jazz and describes its function in Hurston's life. Essentially, it is the author. Most Jazz musicians were itinerant, roaming all over the country to get "gigs." Indeed, I agree that here we find "the picture of Zora Neale Hurston that she wanted the world to see. The careful reader can sense Hurston weaving the story to shape the desired personality, a vague image of an ambitious, driving, fantasizing woman" (Logan 341).

True to its expression, Hurston's "Inside Search," Chapter 4 of Dust Tracks, reveals even more of this Jazz
schematic. Its birth evolved too from personal growth and experience. Jazz questions. Improvisation explores and searches. Zora Neale Hurston as a child recalls the questionings that demanded answers. The child's curiosity asks why? why? why? Adults give them answers based on the proof of acceptance. Nevertheless, through a child's logic, he or she continues to ask why. Even as a child, she saw through the paper tiger. She recalls "Hence the irritation they show when children keep demanding to know if a thing is so and how the grown folks get the proof of it... they have never looked to see if it was so, nor how they came by what passes for proof to their acceptance of certain things as true" (25). This inside search and questionings were to become a part of the researcher, storyteller, and, indeed, folklorist in Hurston. The Jazz here is evident: the search for truth. What was to become uniquely Hurston and characterized her as somewhat eccentric, had its roots in her childhood. Hurston states "So there must be something wrong with a child that questions the gods of the pigeonholes" (25). The stuff that made Hurston unique is that "something wrong" others would estimate. However, this search is a natural inclination for children and an abiding characteristic for the young Zora. She reminisces "I was full of curiosity like many other children, and like them I was as unconscious of the sanctity of statuary as a flock of pigeons around a palace. I got few answers from other
people, but I kept right on asking, because I couldn't do anything else with my feelings" (26). So, too, the Jazz musician explores through improvisation the feelings that are welled-up within. He or she is eccentric, usually an outcast or non-conformist. The search based on feeling and experience, reflects an attitude, a rebellion, a demand. The search is not resolved until the feeling, attitude is satisfied. Young Zora was the Jazz musician. The Jazz schematic is developed through practice. It is a skill Hurston honed as a child, questioning the truth of things and satisfying the thirst for knowledge.

Improvisation is formally defined as "a technique of playing during which the musician, working within certain constraints and conventions, composes his part as he goes along" (Martin 4). Young Zora had to work "within" those social limits and boundaries. This skill prepared Hurston to fight the socio/political and economic constraints and conventions of a Jim Crow society. Kathleen Hassall suggests "Again and again Hurston describes the performances of others or reports her own performances. She also performs -- and when she does so, she never announces her assumptions of a character" (164). She merely observes through recollection the stuff that made her. Moreover, to illustrate this point, Hurston reinforces the improvisational schematic and performance through her "probings." She recalls
no matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know. For instance, I had a stifled longing. I used to climb to the top of one of the huge china berry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like. (27)

It is interesting to note that Hurston's reference to "the horizon" is a recurring image not only in *Dust Tracks* but in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as well. Young Zora's "Dust Tracks" were travel dust that reflected her "probings" to know." The horizon was symbolic of the unlimited universe that she claimed and the song that her mother taught her: "Jump at de sun." Her fiction is similarly linked to her autobiographical prose:

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by time. That is the life of men.

> Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 9)

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston makes a poignant statement about a woman's vision and aspiration in the shadows of a dominating husband. Hurston writes: "Everyday after that they managed to rest in the scrub oaks across the road and talk about when he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits. Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and
blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance. Still she hung back" (49). Janie's second husband's (Joe Starks) vision excludes her. She will "reap the benefits" of a dutiful housewife. Janie, like Hurston, "hung back" when confronted with social obstacles that tended to placate and restrict instead of advancing individual aspiration and vision. Both women are the Jazz improvisers of survival. Janie, after being acquitted of the shooting of her third husband, Tea Cake, is free to go into her horizon of unlimited potentiality: "The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (286). We shall see later how specifically the Jazz schematic or strategy worked in Hurston's favor to accomplish set goals. She recalls one Christmas where her father did not get the horse she so much desired; she, in her usual obstinate, demanding way, only wanted the horse. So, in essence, young Zora created one: "Since Papa would not buy me a saddle horse, I made me one up" (29). Young Zora created a "different" path to attain what she desired.

Hurston relied quite heavily on her childhood experiences because they formed the foundation that effected the Jazz strategy. She credits, along with her parents, a
"gray-haired white man" who greatly influenced her. He "helped me get into the world." Here the Jazz strategy is introduced to her as it applied to the world at large -- beyond the limits of Eatonville. The gray-haired white man, who delivered her into the world, also initiated her into the social and political nature of the world. He told her to "learn right now, not to let your head start more than your behind can stand. Measure out the amount of fighting you can do, and then do it. When you take on too much and get licked, folks will pity you first and scorn you after a while, and that's bad. Use your head!" (31). Thus, the gray-haired man fine tuned for her the riffs of Jazz. Hurston's parents gave her a base; the gray-haired man refined this base and translated its language into the facts of life: Be strong and have faith in self. When confronting the world, use your head; assess and measure the odds, then program the outcome. Young Zora has all she needs to travel that "different path." Kathleen Hassall confirms: "It is possible, however, to read autobiography differently, to read it as a set of glimpses into the character of an inventive, resourceful, spiritual, effective warrior -- in disguise. Pretense, misdirection, secrecy, and a deliberate, slippery, unpredictability -- all venerable confrontational strategies, and all lessons Hurston learned in Eatonville -- direct her performances in Dust Tracks" (160). The community prepared its daughter to be inventive,
imaginative, and, yet, demanding. The gray-haired man gave her food for thought, which became a very important Jazz dimension: "Most folks can't stand to be hurt. But you must realize that getting hurt is part of fighting. Keep right on" (32).

Pain is often a prerequisite to creative endeavors. Jazz was born out of the Blues consciousness of hurt, pain. Social disregard and injustice create the circumstance where Jazz is its inevitable result. Tutored well in its art, the individual performs the solo effectively, improvising the riff and melody; the "different path" taken is its identity. Gunther Schuller affirms the Jazz strategy here by indicating that "in fact it would not be difficult for a social historian to argue that much of jazz's strength and persistence derives from its ceaseless battle with opposition and neglect, and its constant confrontation with impossible odds. Indeed, its very birth and existence derive from its creators' deprived place in our history and society. What an irony in all this!" (13). Strength indeed is often born against the odds. Faith grows in adversity and oppression. It is all one can truly possess. As a result, strength is fostered, honed, with a new affirmation and sense of mission -- a dignity and character that preserve self, community, and culture. Values are cultivated and preserved. Nevertheless, a strong sense of urgency characterizes its movement. This is the
improvisational impulse — to find. Jazz is tempered with lofty, soaring executions of the mind, body, and spirit. It assumes a nobility -- indeed, a consciousness. It rises to a standard and maintains its ideal. Anything less would be, in reality, futile. Still loneliness, the child of the Blues, stands in its shadow. Zora Neale Hurston occupies its place. From early childhood into the maturity of adulthood, Hurston stood apart, characterized as what critics would term eccentric. In her own words:

I consider that my real childhood ended with the coming of the pronouncements. True, I played, fought and studied with other children, but always I stood apart within. Often I was in some lonesome wilderness, suffering strange things and agonies while other children in the same yard played without a care. I asked myself why me? Why? Why? A cosmic loneliness was my shadow. Nothing and nobody around me really touched me. It is one of the blessings of this world that few people see visions and dream dreams. (43)

Here the art of Jazz strategy is cultivated. Eatonville gave her the insight into the life beyond its boundary.

An essential part of Jazz strategy is signifying. To signify is to cloak, tease, become illusive. In Eatonville, Hurston recalls Joe Clarke's store -- "the heart and spring of the town." The connection here lies in the folktale -- the story-teller. The folktale and music, through signifyin', merge. Geneva Smitherman reinforces how signifyin' techniques and characteristics connect with my observation of Jazz-improvisation and the folktale here. She states: "Signification. . . refers to the verbal art of
insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles -- that is, signifies on -- the listener.

Sometimes signifyin' (also siggin) is done to make a point, sometimes its just for fun" (118). The implied deception of signifyin' connects with what Hurston heard at Joe Clarke's. The animal tales make a point, just as Jazz was created to express individuality and cultural identity. Furthermore, Smitherman gives examples of signifyin' to illustrate this observation: "Reverend Jesse Jackson, merging sacred and secular siggin in a Breakfast Saturday morning sermon: 'Pimp, punk, prostitute, preacher, Ph.D. -- all the P's -- you still in slavery!' Moreover, she cites "A black middle-class wife to her husband who had just arrived home several hours later than usual: 'you sho got home early today for a change'" (120). Signifying is found here just as it is found in Jazz. The message or point Rev. Jackson makes is a creative attempt to show the deception of the American political/social system as it relates to the African American. Sarcasm, like Jazz improvisation, is cunning, sharp witted, using intellect. Shown above, we see that signifyin' has the following characteristics: "indirection, circumlocution, -- metaphorical -- imagistic (but images rooted in the everyday, real world); humorous, ironic; rhythmic fluency and sound; teachy but not preachy; directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context (siggers do not talk behind your back); punning,"
play on words; introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected" (Smitherman 121). Joe Clarke's store porch setting is described by these words.

She recollects "But what I really loved to hear was the menfolks holding a 'lying' session. That is, straining against each other in telling folks tales. God, Devil, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis Cat, Brer Bear, Lion, Tiger, Buzzard, and all the wood folk walked and talked like natural men" (47). Moreover, it is necessary to understand Hurston's conception of the store porch "as a stage for the presentation of black folklore" (Hemenway 239). The Jazz-folklore link is reinforced. Hemenway emphasizes

When Hurston writes of Eatonville, the store porch is all-important. It is the center of the community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it is where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior. The store porch, in Zora's language, is "the center of the world." To describe the porch's activities she often uses the phrase 'crayon enlargements of life -- "When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to."

Hemenway's account shows the Jazz metaphor of the 'lying sessions' at Joe Clarke's. Hurston, too, saw the lying sessions as "crayon enlargements of life." Here, she receives the riffs that make Jazz strategy a practical one. The "lying" sessions cloak the truth behind the tale. The dieties and animals play both subordinate and overpowering roles. If the weaker character succeeds in outwitting the
stronger, the Jazz strategy triumphs. The language and act signify. For example, African American folklore cites Brer Rabbit as a subordinate or weaker character who outsmarts the lion or other dominating and powerful characters. However, Brer Rabbit or the weaker character is not always victor over a more powerful one. In a folktale entitled "Straighten Up and Fly Right" (John Blackamore), the popular song recorded by Nat King Cole, the Rabbit is outsmarted by the powerful Buzzard. Eventually the Buzzard meets his match with the monkey, but he eats the Rabbit and squirrel. John Blackamore relates

One day the Buzzard was sailing around the sky looking for food. He hadn't found none, when he spied a Rabbit looking for a cool place to rest, in the midday sun. So he decided he'd try to get him. . . Rabbit says he's pretty hot. Buzzard tells him it's cooler up where he came from, and suggested the Rabbit go for a ride. . . But since the Buzzard looked so rested and cool, finally he accepts. . . When he thought the Rabbit felt all cool and comfortable, Buzzard assures him they are going to make a landing. Down, he roars, about a hundred feet straight down in a power dive, and then zooms back up. And the Rabbit falls off. So he had the Rabbit for lunch. (Dorson 116, #30)

But most tales present Brer Rabbit's wit and cunning. He's the Jazz trickster — improviser. Dorson says "Ber Rabbit plays the common role of trickster — a perennial rascal around whom a strung an episodic cycle of deceptions and hoaxes — so popular throughout folklore. As one informant puts it, 'Rabbit always the schemey one'" (66).

The folktale and music tradition merge as a continuum of African survivals. Portia K. Maultsby states that "The
continuum of an African Consciousness in America manifests itself in the evolution of an African-American culture. The music, dance, folklore, religion, language, and other expressive forms associated with the culture of slaves were transmitted orally to subsequent generations of American blacks" (185). Thus, the roots of Jazz as we know the term today, have always been a part of African and African American lore. Blues, rising out of unfortunate circumstances, creates the Jazz strategy. The music metaphorically presents its schematic and design. "These forms are unique by-products of specific contexts and historical periods" (Maultsby 185). Life for the African American in post-reconstruction defines its strategy, using these cultural survival methods. "Improvisational musical composition seems to have been ubiquitous in Africa. Traditional associations, master-singers, work groups, and individual villagers all composed songs satirically alluding to complaints against neighbors and relatives, great men and rulers, moreover, Africans seemed especially to enjoy lampooning the Europeans with whom they had dealings. Through the satire of derisive songs, African societies discouraged unpleasant and dangerous face-to-face confrontations. Instead, social etiquette allowed a safer, more effective, and certainly more entertaining manner of criticism" (Piersen 20). Music and folklore are created out of an experience, a context, and circumstance. Maya
Angelou notes "There is an eerie, sometimes pathetic, oftimes beautiful urge that prevails in Black American lore, lyrics and literature. The impulse, simply put, is to tell the story... to tell one's own story... as one has known it, and lived it, and even died it" (vii).

The trickster figure was a well-known character among the story-tellers at Joe Clarke's. For example, in a selected tale "How Brer Dog Lost His Beautiful Voice" from Mules and Men, the trickster rabbit outsmarts the dog. Both the rabbit and dog vowed for the attention of a certain female. While the rabbit courted her, the dog serenaded her with song and banjo. Not convinced that his voice was mellow and sweet, the dog submitted to the rabbit's cunning; note the particular violence of this tale: the castration imagery embedded in the image of cutting off the tongue of a rival suitor.

Well, dat's de very point Ah'm commin' out on. Ah know a way to make yo' voice sweeter."
"How? Brer Rabbit, how?"...
"Ah got to see inside yo' throat first. Lemme see dat and Ah can tell you exactly what to do so you can sing more better."
Brer Dog stretched his mouth wide open and the rabbit peered way down inside. Brer dog had his mouth latched back to de last notch and his eyes shut. So Brer Rabbit pulled out his razor and split Brer Dog's tongue and tore out across de mountain wid de dog right in behind him! Brer Rabbit had done ruint Brer dog's voice, . . . (110)

Hurston connects Mules and Men, a book of folklore with Dust Tracks, a similar collection of folklore and
autobiographical narrative. Her life was a part of these tales. Confronted with social and political obstacles, Hurston found these tales, in particular the trickster figure who represents the Jazz metaphor, born out of this experience. Its heritage defines history, truth. Hurston, too, while recalling this important memory was aware of its power.

Folklore and Jazz are further implicit through Hurston's autobiographical prose. Hemenway adds that "Folklore, Hurston said, is the art people create before they find out there is such a thing as art; it comes from a folk's 'first wandering contact with natural law' -- that is, laws of human nature as well as laws of natural process, the truths of a group's experience as well as the principles of physics. These interpretations of nature, called 'unscientific' or 'crude,' often turn out to be wise and poetic explanations for the ways of the world'' (159).

Truth, through these explanations, observations, and experiences, is more closely revealed. The store porch is its setting. Hemenway observes the musical connection here; he, in a sense, reinforces this folklore -- Jazz (musical tradition) link by saying

If someone brought a guitar, the storytelling would stop, and the night would become haunted with the words of the blues, or reverberate with the rhythm of a railroad worksong learned from a "singing liner." Small children waiting for their mothers to call them to bed could listen to the elaborate guitar style of a man like Bubber Mimms, champion orange picker and one of the town's best "box" players. A mouth harp
might suddenly appear and the guitar solo became a duet. Before long others were joining in, beating out rhythm against the bottom of overturned nail kegs.  

(13)

Hemenway reinforces this observation: "There is no separation of subject and object, of mind and material in folk tradition. What appears from afar as material for the creative artist is simply behavior for the tale-teller, an activity as natural as thinking: traditional art is perpetuated without self-consciousness" (81). Dan Morgenstern agrees that "Jazz developed from folk sources. Its origins are shrouded in obscurity, but the slaves brought here from Africa, torn from their own ancestral culture, developed it as a new form of communication in song and story" (5). Therefore, as Angelou stated, the story tellers at Joe Clarke's told their own story, what they knew and lived. The fine line between song and story here is truth, reality, and vision.

This performance activates the role that Hurston prepares for. She emphasizes childhood in Eatonville because of this nurturing, this spiritual food: "Hurston describes a community which supports, nourishes, and fosters not only relaxation, but performance. Eatonville functions as a stage on which individuals and groups adopt spontaneous, creative poses; they act out courtships and feuds, conversions and triumphs, history and prophesy. In Eatonville, performance, or as Hurston significantly terms it, 'lying,' is the central creative activity" (Hassall
This statement supports my view that Hurston defines herself in terms of her Eatonville childhood. She does not merely lie throughout Dust Tracks to mask the real Hurston. This is Zora Neale Hurston: the Jazz strategist. She has the ability to create life out of experience and sometimes out of nothingness. This is truly the Jazz schematic revelation: "When inanimate things ceased to commune with me like natural men, other dreams come to live with me. Animals took on lives and characteristics which nobody knew anything about except myself. Little things that people did or said grew into fantastic stories" (57). Hurston reveals here that she had to be spiritually fulfilled through the truth in humanity. She has to know that there was a one to one -- soul to soul -- contact in order to receive life, to live. When this was absent, she created life: The Jazz master and artist. Hurston improvised and created for herself a melody that adhered to her needs, her spirit. Therefore, how can critics possibly call her a "lie" in Dust Tracks on a Road? She defines self in terms of the truth only known to her. People were her sources for creativity. They gave her stories, lore, fantasy. Eatonville gave the writer in her the gift of the spirit, the ancestors. Therefore, it is easy to see why "so many events in this text are figured in terms of Hurston’s growing awareness and mastery of books and language, language, and linguistic rituals as spoken and written both by masters of the Western
tradition and by ordinary members of the black community" (Gates 264). Moreover, this growing awareness coincided with the skills she obtained through the Jazz schematic. Hurston emphasized that "my phantasies were still fighting against the facts" (60). The "juices" within her that caused her to wander, question, and create were indeed survival gifts. Perhaps planted by a spiritual source, her ancestors, or developed from perception, these gifts became tools for survival. To be heralded as a leading writer in a time of segregation and other forms of restraint, she epitomized what it is to be a woman, African American, and artist. One final point. Critics should see behind Hurston's performance. They should read and define Hurston from her own definition and language. The story tellers at Joe Clarke's were performing Jazz through the trickster. They were telling history, oppression, even hope and aspirations. All is here. All is embedded in the music of Jazz language. "Her critics charged that this view fed stereotypes held by whites without showing the brutality suffered by negroes in southern society. The Eatonville cloak Hurston wrapped around herself permitted her to project the view of an all-negro community having only the slightest contact with whites" (Logan 340). I submit that the brutality is embedded in the language, the music of the tales, the lore. Beverly J. Robinson offers

The word folklore is of course a composite of folk, now meaning "people" regardless of its earlier class
connotations, and lore, meaning "knowledge." Thus it is the knowledge of the people -- not just any knowledge that has proved to be valuable within a community because it has passed the test of time, a lore that people have found to contain important representations of themselves as a group. The folklore of specific groups of people, moreover, helps explain how people come into unity; again, it is a way of looking at their community. In examining African-American folklore one finds that the expressive knowledge based in the traditions of African-Americans discloses their sense of community and heritage. (212)

Hurston's sense of mission too was born out of this Jazz strategy. Her wandering spirit told its melody. The artist in her needed an improvised journey, though beset with the pain that often accompanies it. After the death of her mother, Hurston's father remarried. Hurston reminisces "My vagrancy had begun in reality. I knew that. There was an end to my journey and it had happiness in it for me. It was certain and sure. By the Way! Its agony was equally certain. It was before me, and no one could spare me my pilgrimage. The rod of compelment was laid to my back. I must go the way" (84). The young Zora was prepared to go the way. Being a maid, confidant, and servant, young Zora used what she had to enter the road upon which she had chosen. Perhaps to better illustrate this improvisational technique, Rex Harris presents a relevant analogy: "Picture, however, the problem of a Berber, inhabitant of a waterless desert, suddenly faced with the urge to cross a newly discovered river or lake: with no tools, and no equipment, his powers of improvisation are going to be stretched to the fullest extent. In fact, improvisation
will be the operative theme of his enterprise; it will be his God" (25). Zora Neale Hurston was like the Berber. She had to improvise to achieve goals, to effect ends. Her Jazz strategy was intact. The riffs, chords that harmonize the Jazz solo were the advice Hurston received from her Eatonville home and community. The Berber, like his model in the African American, and, specifically Zora Neale Hurston "So, too, with the evolution of jazz and the emphasis upon improvisation. . . to start from rock-bottom, he was compelled to draw primarily upon the inspiration of his own mind. There being, as yet, neither the opportunity nor the equipment for providing a written musical language, it was completely natural that the Negro musician should lose his art upon improvisation" (Harris 25).

In Chapter I of my musical analysis of African American autobiography, we saw how the rocks of faith, dignity, compassion, and strength became the "juices" that revitalized the ancestral and community spirit in James Weldon Johnson. He found a "Home In Dat Rock." The Spiritual guided Johnson's faith in himself. As a result, he was beneficial, not only to himself, but to his home, community, country, and the world at large. Like Johnson, Hurston was "compelled to draw primarily upon the inspiration of her own mind." She was "rock-bottom" in terms of financial support, pursuing an education, and having a "home." She had no other choice but to rely on her
Eatonville nurturing. Perhaps unconsciously, Hurston was reinforced with the technical skill and armor of the Jazz strategy. She used it. The individual in Hurston longed to be free. This was the true Zora Neale Hurston. She assumes the identity.

I was soon out of a job again. I got out of many more. Sometimes I didn’t suit the people. Sometimes the people didn’t suit me. Sometimes my insides tortured me so that I was not the type. I was doing none of the things I wanted to do. I had to do numerous uninteresting things I did not want to do, and it was tearing me to pieces. I wanted family love and peace and a resting place. I wanted books and school. . . . I felt crowded in on, and hope was beginning to waver. (90)

The Jazz soloist certainly is not the type. The Jazz soloist finds it difficult to follow, conform, be a "type." He or she creates out of a special need within that tortures and twists until that something is free to express. Jazz is a rebellion. The Jazz artist must find creative expression through whatever means are available to him or her. The potency of the solo becomes even more sharp and stinging when faced with restraint and restriction. To be effective, improvisation, at its best, battles the foes of inhibition and imprisonment. It needs life, breath, air, and so does the improvisor. Zora Neale Hurston cries out for this freedom. She "had a way of life inside me and I wanted it with a want that was twisting me" (94). Its fantasy is a search for reality. Thus, the metaphor is enhanced and
extended. The real Zora Neale Hurston shines the light of truth -- her cultural identity.

After eighteen months as a lady's maid to a professional singer, Hurston's dreams started to become realities. The "different path" taken through Jazz improvisation indeed worked. The singer left the stage after marriage and encouraged Hurston who had been out of school, to go back and complete her education. Hurston explains

We were in Northern Virginia then, and moving towards Baltimore. When we got there, she inquired about schools, gave me a big bearful hug, and what little money she could spare and told me to keep in touch with her. She would do whatever she could to help me out. That was the way we parted. . . though neither of us realized it, I had been in school all that time. I had loosened up in every joint and expanded in every direction. I had done some reading. Not as much as before, but more discriminate reading. (102)

Hurston "discovered" that humanity and love wear no color, and that individuals had the power to shape and mold. That is, the singer gave Hurston a sense of awareness: "I had loosened up in every joint and expanded in every direction. . ." and became a "discriminate reader." The educational process can be channeled a number of ways. For young Zora, a singer became one of her early teachers who introduced her to the limitless possibilities of her mind. The Jazz artist then recognizes originality. This awareness allowed Hurston to be a discriminate observer. She criticizes great singers and performers: "Perhaps that was their trouble."
They were not originators, but followers of originators" (103). Taste is developed through discrimination. To understand Jazz music, one must indeed develop a discriminating taste in technique, execution, and originality of the solo, of the improvisation. This taste is developed through education and training. Joachin Berendt notes this skill necessary for the successful Jazz artist and strategist. He relays in his preface Louis Armstrong's saying that "You've got to love to be able to play." Zora Neale Hurston truly loved life in all its dimensions. Her Eatonville experience shows the wonder and natural curiosity of the child. Her natural love of people is shown through observing the townsfolk and talking to neighbors. Too "the self of the musician is clearly reflected, in the most immediate and direct fashion (Berendt 149). The Jazz artist cannot hide truth in self. Indeed, the musical strategy is a search for truth. The improvisation reflects the search.

Because Hurston was criticized for hiding herself in the folds of language, the question here would suggest whose definition of herself should we as readers and researchers follow. Certainly Hurston defines herself in terms of Jazz strategy and improvisation. Berendt further explains "Because a jazz musician's playing is 'true' in a direct, naive, and 'primitive' way, it may possess beauty even when it contradicts aesthetic standards. One could say that the
beauty of jazz is ethical rather than aesthetic. To be able to respond to jazz means first and foremost to be able to feel this kind of beauty" (Berendt 150). Love is the ultimate aesthetic in beauty. Because Hurston possessed this love, she is originator, creator. She set the standards by which she rises. Only the true Jazz artist can define self in these terms. Like the Jazz artist, Hurston redefines self from the individual she claims and exalts. We have seen where Hurston received her early training in the use of Jazz strategy; through the many jobs and specifically her singer's acknowledged influence, Hurston hones the Jazz strategy and develops the taste to truly respect the gift and use it wisely. She states with a confident air "It was not at all clear to me now I was going to do it, but I was going back to school. . . . I took a firm grip on the only weapon I had -- hope -- and set my feet. Maybe everything would be all right from now on. Maybe. Well, I put on my shoes and I started" (103). Thus, the African American musical tradition is linked with this hope. We find it in Spirituals, Jazz, and Blues. Hope creates the music. Hope, indeed, creates the strategy. Hope builds faith in self and community. Hope can truly be recognized as the only thing the African American possessed through the trials of slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow. It garnered faith and spirituality that strengthens, adds vision, and the power to improvise to effect ends. It is
what brought the African American to realize his and her powers of creativity and originality. Zora Neale Hurston stands on this hope like her ancestors. Maya Angelou, too, acknowledges the Jazz in Hurston: "One reading of Hurston is enough to convince the reader that Hurston had dramatic adventures and was a quintessential survivor" (viii).

Though admittedly she "walks on fly paper" Hurston successfully enters night school in Baltimore "and that did something for my soul" (107).

Zora Neale Hurston, the performer rises on cue. The stage (the world, opportunity) provides the place. Hurston provides the act, the role that is necessary to complete the story. Kathleen Hassell further notes this dynamic by saying "one way to make sense of this problematic text is to recognize it as a series of performances by an actress trained in Eatonville. It might be argued that Zora Neale Hurston was essentially a performance artist: she was a natural actress; a sometimes joyful, often brilliant mimic; a woman inconsistent in many ways and often by choice, but consistent in employing her various media as both message and massage" (160). Against this backdrop, strength is reinforced: of mind and of talent. Confidently, she states "This was my world, I said to myself, and I shall be in it, and surrounded by it, if it is the last thing I do on God's green dirt-ball" (107). Indeed, Hurston had found her home, her place in the night school classroom. She successfully
searched and found the home she prepared for in Eatonville and in Jacksonville. The opportunity enlivened her life with the electrical charge that was to always be a part of her; others who know her felt the energy too. She radiated with spontaneity and life. Perhaps her English teacher, Dwight O. W. Holmes, can be credited as opening up further Hurston's world. He became just one in the long line of individuals who gave Hurston the armor to eventually win a fight that was to be her own. She said of him: "There I met the man who was to give me the key to certain things. There is no more dynamic teacher anywhere under any skin. He radiates newness and nerve and says to your mind, 'There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. Let's go see what it is.' He is a pilgrim to the horizon. Anyway, that is the way he struck me. He made the way clear. Something about his face killed the drabness and discouragement in me. I felt that the thing could be done" (107). Holmes, as Hurston would recall, "gave me the key to certain things." He gave her the key of curiosity that set Hurston's mind, body, and spirit start to wandering. The key gave Hurston the initiative and forcefulness to get an education that would broaden her mind beyond the limits of Eatonville. It charged her with the tenacity to become the Zora Neale Hurston this key would unlock. Maya Angelou questions "Why did Hurston write Dust Tracks on a Road? Whose song was she singing? And to whose ears was she directing her melody?"
My conclusion based upon the Jazz schematic is truth. She sang the song only known to her, what she heard, saw, and felt. Thus, her song -- her life -- becomes the pure, unaltered, and unabridged Zora Neale Hurston.

Whatever endeavor Hurston participated in, it had to do "something for my soul." Jazz claims soul revitalizing and profiting. The real Hurston is grounded in self actualization. However fragmentary and chaotic Hurston's life seemed, the "liminality" of the Jazz state -- its spiritual counterpart -- was her forcefield and foundation.

Leonard Neil purports similar findings:

Jazz sects, along with many of their religious counterparts, are, to use Victor Turner's terms, 'liminal' or 'liminoid,' existing on the fringes or in the cracks of the social structure. . . in the fissures or on the edges of the received order. Flourishing in egalitarian, simply organized groups and guided mainly by peers, they operate at a remove from many ordinary responsibilities and preconceptions and freely question conventional standards of behavior and belief. Their climate is charged with potency and potentiality that encourages experimentation, spontaneity, improvisation, and imagination in art and in conduct. (25)

This was indeed Hurston's identity. For Hurston, Jazz

. . . which in the right circumstances produced transcendent occasions of serendipitous improvisation. The fellowship developed in such moments suggests. . . "communitas," a spiritual bond nourished in liminality and based on other worldly experience or knowledge. Communitas, he [Victor Turner]explains, is usually considered sacred because it transgresses the rules that govern institutionalized relationships. It leads to unprecedented feelings of potency fueled by extraordinary interpersonal communication simultaneously operating at different levels of awareness -- "wholeness wholly attending," in deep understanding and reciprocity. (Neil 28)
This "inner spirit" that gives life to Jazz performance is the "something special" Hurston relished. She sought out its truth at every opportunity. She applied it to every endeavor and watched for its healing attributes. This healing is found in Hurston's self actualization to indeed survive amid speculation, hardship, and fragmentation. At Howard University, she is able to seek and apply the spirit behind the impetus of Jazz performance: "I shall never forget my first college assembly, sitting there in the chapel of that great university. I was so exalted that I said to the spirit of Howard, 'You have taken me in. I am a tiny bit of your greatness. I swear to you that I shall never make you ashamed of me.' It did not wear off. Every time I sat there as part and parcel of things, looking up there at the platform crowded with faculty members, the music, the hundreds of students about me, it would come down on me again" (114). Hence Hurston perceived life and all of its eventualities from this spiritual perspective.

Education served as her springboard for "spontaniety, experimentation, and improvisation." She lived on the "fringes" of a Jim Crow society. Therefore, forced to generate, create, survive. This is Jazz performance; behind it is the liminal status of the spirit that produces Jazz potency and worth. Hurston's love for Howard embodied this spiritual perspective of Jazz performance. She savorsthe words of Howard's alma mater that reads:
Reared against the eastern sky  
Proudly there on hill-top high  
Up above the lake so blue  
Stands old Howard brave and true.  
There she stands for truth and right,  
Sending forth her rays of light,  
Clad in robes of majesty  
Old Howard! We sing of thee.

These words touched Hurston's spirit in a special way. They reinforced the "riffs" of Jazz she received as a child in Eatonville and as a young domestic and servant. She acknowledges that "My soul stood on tip toe and stretched up to take in all that it meant. So I was careful to do my class work and be worthy to stand there under the shadow of the hovering spirit of Howard. I felt the ladder under my feet" (115). True to the "riffs" of Jazz in Howard's alma mater "There she stands for truth and right" Hurston sent "forth her rays of light" that refused to be squelched by condition or status. Not only does she honorably stand in the spirit of Howard, she stands in the shadows of her spiritual "clouds of witnesses" that gave her the spirit to survive; Jazz performance through its spiritual component prepares the improvisation needed to attain goals and survive. Hurston acknowledges her cultural and ancestral identity. Truly she "felt the ladder under my feet;" her next step: Barnard.

Barnard College afforded Zora Neale Hurston the opportunity to "jump at de sun." Recalling her training there, she states "I needed my Barnard education to help me see my people as they really are. But I found that it did
not do to be too detached as I stepped aside to study them. I had to go back, dressed as they did, talk as they did, live their life, so that I could get into my stories the world I knew as a child" (Hemenway 215). She studied under the famed Anthropologist/Folklorist Dr. Franz Boas. The "King of Kings" as she aptly describes him guided her on a career route that would win her fame through literary and folklore circles. Certainly Dr. Boas provided a very important step on Hurston's ladder. We shall see later where her folklore journeys and research reinforced her cultural identity as an African American and, here, her Jazz strategy through improvisation is presented. Hurston's spiritual connection at Howard merged with Barnard: "I had the same feeling at Barnard that I did at Howard, only more so. I felt that I was highly privileged and determined to make the most of it" (123). Faith in self, which has been echoed through Hurston's self-script, is the key to her identity. She measured herself from her own "inner" yardstick. Like Jazz performance, she is individualized in all that makes up the total self. Leonard Neil states that "Great improvisers are like priests: they thinking only of their god" (74). Hurston's goals in defining self in terms of an inner spiritual quality is, too, Jazz. She states:

So I set out to maintain a good average, take part of the college like everybody else, I graduated with a "B" record, and I am entirely satisfied. . . . Booker T. Washington said once that you must not judge a man by the heights to which he has risen, but by the depths from which
he came. So to me these honors meant something, insignificant as they might appear to the world. It was a long step for the waif of Eatonville. From the depth of my inner heart I appreciated the fact that the world had not been altogether unkind to Mama's child. (124)

Hurston's soaring spirit comes alive through the intimations of freedom and the joy of self realization. She exceeds boundary. "Hurston continually challenges us to rethink our preconceptions, to forswear our fantasies. Attentively read, she reminds that more often than not the autobiographies of Afro-American women have been written from within the cage. Frequently they sing with the voice of freedom, but always they betray the confinement from which that freedom is wrested" (Fox-Genovese 177). So here we see Hurston relying on the spirit within to fortify her with strength and endurance. Yes, she is aware of the social condition of a Jim Crow America yet, she teaches the precept of self-determination. Certainly Jazz strategy has given her the optimistic spirit by which she exudes confinement, but Barnard became her refuge, think tank, and place where her mind could take her far beyond confinement - - racial and/or social.

As with the woman autobiographer generally, and in particular, the African American woman autobiographer, typically she shows through Jazz, Blues, and Spirituals, the history of self and how self survived. Hurston's earlier statement echoes this concept and observation. Still, this concept could have been broadened
but the freedom of her soul (African American women autobiographers) cannot relieve the confinement for her body. The self, in other words, develops in opposition to, rather than as an articulation of, condition. Yet, the condition remains as that against which the self is forged. And the condition, as much as the representations of self, constitutes an inescapable aspect of the Afro-American female literary tradition, especially of Afro-American women's autobiographies. (Fox-Genovese 177)

This constant fighting against condition is the tie that binds the African American literati. The autobiographer presents the solo event that reflects a wider, and much broader struggle common to the African American community in post-reconstruction and/or phase of American social exclusion. Condition states the Blues. The Blues initiates the Jazz performance to affect condition. Jazz strategy incorporates the inner badge or spirit of the soloist whose improvisation is individualized. Even though Hurston "do not weep at the world -- I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife" ("How It Feels To Be Colored Me" 153), the Blues condition is imminent.

Certainly Jazz is essential in characterizing Hurston at this point, Blues must be incorporated as a metaphor for Hurston's apparent "unconscious" Blues state here. Note that "The Blues is many things -- the music of people, a style of music, a type of performance, a despondent state of mind, and a musical form. As all these things, the blues has contributed to Jazz. Within a formal concept of continuous improvisation over a constantly recurring harmonic framework, the blues has given jazz its most significant
element" (Tirro 148). Indeed, African American condition is cloaked in Hurston's statement: "the world had not been altogether unkind to Mama's child." She's the Jazz soloist, improvising the condition; therefore, the Jazz performance must be defined from a Blues condition. "Without blues, as interior animation, jazz has no history" (Baraka & Baraka 264). So Hurston, as African American autobiographer, relates the self in terms of its spiritual awareness to affect condition.

Jazz strategy articulates the movement. Hence Hurston matriculates successfully at Barnard. Accordingly, "the challenge of the autobiographer, then, is to relate the ideal self to the self of every day life -- the contingent self" (Fox-Genovese 178). Hurston searches for completion in her story. She clearly makes known that acquiring knowledge is a special joy. It would be her springboard to a career that displays her literary talents. Note, "certainly one of the ways Hurston disguises herself all her life was to deconstruct the borders between various definitions of herself and her work" (Hassall 167). However, at this point, and as we shall see later, Hurston wears no disguise. She deconstructs definitions of self but redefines self from a cultural identity. When she recalls Booker T. Washington's statement "that you must not judge a man by the heights to which he has risen, but by the depths from which he came," she, in essence, merges her African
American cultural identity with that of the opportunities she claims in education.

It is necessary to look more deeply into Hurston's "deconstruction of borders" that defy classification. Hurston was in some respects an iconoclast. The iconoclast like the Jazz artist moves against expectation and tradition. Jazz is the spiritual response to stimuli. This is Hurston's clue in her persistent search for truth. Moreover, we shall see later where she uses this same inner quality in field research and literature. Hurston declares "I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject [race]. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. Circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no" (151). This is the way Hurston perceives the truth in things. She takes this philosophy into her every endeavor. For example, she wrote Their Eyes Were Watching God in Haiti "under internal pressure in seven weeks." Hurston allowed her inner spirit to connect with the spiritual source that gives her energy and talent to create. Thus, she defies Jim Crow and other psychological strategies that inhibit and repress. The power of the spirit is greater than social imposition. She states forthrightly that "Perhaps it is just as well to be rash and
foolish for a while. If writers were too wise, perhaps no books would be written at all. . . . Any way, the force from somewhere in Space which commands you to write in the first place, gives you no choice. You take up the pen when you are told, and write what is commanded. There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you" (Dust Tracks 156). Here, Hurston does not separate the Jazz impulse and spirit behind it. Just like the writer, the Jazz artist takes up his or her instrument -- pen or horn -- and creates from a spiritual command. Whatever is inside of the artist, it must be expressed. Zora Neale Hurston indeed tapped into this sustaining source. It perceives no racial limitations, only survives whatever condition. Mary Helen Washington echoes Hurston's intent: "Hurston was determined to write about black life as it existed apart from racism, injustice, Jim Crow -- where black people laughed, celebrated, loved, sorrowed, struggled -- unconcerned about white people and completely unaware of being 'a problem'" (17). There are no white characters in Their Eyes Were Watching God, but there is an implied white world; this comes out in the color consciousness of certain characters -- Mrs. Turner thinking Janie was too light skinned to be with Tea Cake, and in other more indirect ways -- Jody's assumption of white hierarchical values as Mayor. Mrs. Turner to Janie: "You're different from me. Ah can't stand black niggers. Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' em 'cause Ah can't stand
'em mahself. 'Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid 'em. Us oughta class off". . . . "And dey makes me tired . . . Always singin' ol' nigger songs!" (210). Mrs. Turner was a part of Hurston's "black life" she was so determined to write about. Dust Tracks and Their Eyes merge. Jody's assumption is here, too, in Their Eyes: Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with bannisters and such things. The rest of the town looked like servant's quarters surrounding the 'big house.' And different from everybody else in the town he put off moving in until it had been painted, in and out. And look at the way he painted it -- a gloaty, sparkly white. The kind of promenading white that the houses of Bishop Whipple, W.B. Jackson and the Vanderpool's wore. It made the village feel funny talking to him -- just like he was anybody else. (75)

Dr. Franz Boas fine tuned her talent for field research by "pushing" her into the field: "He knew I was green and feeling my oats, and that only bitter disappointment was going to purge me. It did " (128). He was instrumental in insisting that she do field research. "He was particularly interested in African survivals in Afro-American culture, and Zora Hurston's field work would be part of the evidence documenting this unique Afro-American sub-culture; if the findings refuted ignorant racial stereotypes arising from the absence of Anthropological data, so much the better" (Hemenway 88). Research, like Jazz improvisation, searches and explores for new discoveries and new ways of perceiving things. The Jazz in Hurston merges with academics. The music is a part of the researcher in Hurston. Here she
defines her work: "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein" (127). True to Jazz improvisation, research reaches out to find, discover; it says: "There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. Let's go see what it is." In Dust Tracks, Hurston values her Barnard education. Robert Hemenway observes "Barnard left Zora Hurston seeking a scientific explanation for why her own experience in the black rural south, despite all her education, remained the most vital part of her life, and why the black folk experience generally was the primary impetus for her imagination" (63). The pull here is academic constraints merged with folk freedom. Hurston bridges the gap.

True to Zora Neale Hurston, research is the fundamental route through which Jazz defines and improvisation acts. The spirit is the guiding light that effects change and discovery. The Jazz musician knows no boundary. The improvised search is continuous, until resolved. To illustrate, Hemenway states

Although anthropology and art are not incompatible vocations, they can imply different uses of personal experience. When Hurston became fascinated with anthropology, she acquired the relatively rare opportunity to confront her culture both emotionally and analytically, both as subject and as objects. She had lived Afro American folklore before she knew that such a thing existed as a scientific concept or had special value as evidence of the adaptive creativity of a unique subculture. Hurston came to
know that her parents and their neighbors perpetuated a rich oral literature without self-consciousness, a literature illustrating a creativity seldom recognized and almost universally misunderstood. (22)

This is Hurston: "My life was in danger several times. If I had not learned how to take care of myself in these circumstances, I could have been maimed or killed on most any day of the several years of my research work. Primitive minds are quick to sunshine and quick to anger. Some little word, look or gesture can move them either to love or to sticking a knife between your ribs. You must have to sense the delicate balance and maintain it" (130). Here, in a broadened context, Hurston is the Jazz artist. Identity is resolved with each new find. The African American community, through Hurston's field research, is that reservoir of untapped Africanisms, song, story. However, in order to tap this rich resource, improvisation is needed. The function Hurston performs is that of chronicler, gatherer, and interpreter. Even more important the Jazz musician must "have to sense the delicate balance and maintain it" because, in the field, this could mean life or death, cooperation or failure. Hurston's training insisted on determination and dedication. Franz Boas' search for truth guided his student in her dedication in search of truth. Hemenway states that one has only to cultivate a "genius for pure objectivity," as Franz Boas did, and let the evidence prove the absurdity of racial prejudice. Moreover, because anthropology also proves the existence of particular cultural differences while simultaneously positing a
basic sameness in the human condition, one can maintain the integrity of black culture without sacrificing it to the mythical American melting pot. The scientific collection of black folklore comes to prove black humanity as it asserts the beauty of the culture.

This Jazz strategy and concept is further illustrated in Hurston's experience with a jealous woman. To preface the story, Jazz forms Hurston's basic instinct for survival while in the field. Note that "Although certain fixed practices were crucial, one could not simply fall back on routine and remain in custody of the magic, for the mysteries of creativity flourished not in the comfortable realm of the old and familiar but on treacherous, uncharted frontiers. Jazz was a fluid and unpredictable as the raw experience it draw on" (Neil 74). Hurston's early "treacherous and uncharted frontier" in the field took place in Polk County, Florida in a "saw-mill jook." The folklorist knew that she had to dispense with the "order" and "accented Barnardese" in order to be effective in collecting folk materials. The reality of the field does not cater to "routine" or comfortable surroundings. The researcher must become the people he or she interacts with; however, race and ethnicity must be important in this scenario (Anglo in Mexico, White folklorist in the Black community, Black folklorist in the White community). The language, dress, and attitude must be commensurable. The researcher is, indeed, measured accordingly. Robert Hemenway notes that "The collector may enter a community,
often as a stranger, attempt to establish rapport, and then
write down (or, now, tape record) as many of the communal
traditions as the people choose to share. 'Tradition' is the
key word, for the folklorist seeks especially those forms of
communicative behavior -- usually verbal, although they may
also be evident in crafts or kinetic movements -- that have
survived through time by oral transmission" (85). The
field environment has its own social "laws" and outlook.
The folklorist must be the Jazz musician and use
improvisation to appear non-threatening and blend in with
the folk of the region. This is where the "Magic" entails
in the folklorist, the researcher, the Jazz artist. Hurston
had to be aware of the "mysteries" behind a folk culture.
Note that "Formal culture grows primarily from the
presumption of the written heritage; traditional culture
arises primarily out of the communicative expectations of a
given group" (Hemenway 86). Particularly here, the African
American community of Polk County, she had to find the "key"
with which to unlock the folk reserves of the community. By
doing so, identity is further clarified through "Lucy" who
wanted to kill Hurston, "Slim" who was a valuable source for
folk songs, and "Big Sweet," the woman who protected Hurston
from impending danger in a saw-mill jook joint. Hurston
exemplifies the Jazz strategist in the following lines:
"Lucy really wanted to kill me. I didn't mean any harm.
All I was doing was collecting songs from Slim, who used to
be her man back up in West Florida before he ran off from
her. . . . He was a valuable source of material to me, so I
built him up a bit by buying him drinks and letting him ride
in my car" (135). Lucy, whose jealous rage causes Hurston’s
admitted concern for her life, is but one dimension of the
African American community Hurston presents.

Slim’s songs connect the heritage of the African
American diaspora by providing folk history for
anthropological research and study. "Hurston should collect
a folksong not necessarily because she liked the words or
melody, but so that she might classify its unique
characteristics, compare it to the songs of other cultures,
note its differences, and eventually combine it with a whole
collection in order to determine the significance of music
for Afro-American culture" (Hemenway 91). "Big Sweet" is
protector. The Jazz strategist had to design
improvisational means of getting information (songs) from
Slim. Therefore, Hurston "built him up a bit by buying him
drinks and letting him ride in my car." Thus, the Jazz
soloist becomes part of the community. She blends in and
becomes accepted. To do this, Hurston acknowledges the
social laws of Polk County and buys Slim a drink. Her
language and attitude become the language and attitude of
Polk County. The result: "Big Sweet helped me to collect
material in a big way. She had no idea what I wanted with
it, but if I wanted it, she meant to see to it that I got
it. She pointed out people who knew songs and stories. She wouldn't stand for balkiness on their part. We held two lying contests, story-telling contests to you, and Big Sweet passed on who rated the prizes. In that way, there was no argument about it" (137). It is interesting that Hurston emphasizes the songs and stories of the folk group. She shows here that the culture — music and story — identifies and affirms heritage. Hemenway confirms that "The early blues artist is now considered a tradition — carrier of the Afro-American musical heritage, and some folklorists expend great effort trying to collect the records that Hurston complained about" (92). To Hurston, Slim was that tradition-barrier of the folk. In the following passage from *Dust Tracks* Hurston's love and respect for the African American musical tradition is reinforced by her constructed persona that promoted the idea of the significance of the music reflecting African American life and culture.

I had collected a mass of work-songs, blues and spirituals in the course of my years of research. After offering them to two Negro composers and having them refused on the ground that white audiences would not listen to anything but highly arranged spirituals, I decided to see if that was true. I doubted it because I had seen groups of white people in my father's church as early as I could remember. They had come to hear the singing, and certainly there was no distinguished composer in Zion Hope Baptist Church. The congregation just got hold of the tune and arranged as they went along as the spirit moved them. And any musician, I don't care if he stayed at a conservatory until his teeth were gone and he smelled like old-folks, could never even approach what those untrained singers could do. LET THE PEOPLE SING, was and is my motto, and finally I resolved to see what would happen.
So on money I had borrowed, I put on a show at the John Golden Theater on January 10, 1932, and tried out my theory. The performance was well received by both the audience and critics. Because I know that music without motion is not natural with my people, I did not have the singers stand in a stiff group and reach for the high note. I told them to just imagine that they were in Macedonia and go ahead. . . . I had dramatized a working day on a railroad camp, from the shack-rouser waking up the camp at dawn until the primitive dance in the deep woods at night. (Dust Tracks 152)

The improvisational manner in which strategies are channeled effectively blends and becomes a part of a total identity. That identity is part and parcel of the Jazz artist interpretation of the assigned task. For example, Hurston, while observing a black church congregation receiving the testimonies of "saved" witnesses, notes the improvisational manner of the candidates for membership. Their visions became Jazz improvised solos: "These visions are traditional. I knew them by heart as did the rest of the congregation, but still it was exciting to see how the converts would handle them. Some of them made up new details. Some of them would forget a part and improvise clumsily or fill up the gap with shouting. The audience knew, but everybody acted as if every word of it was new" (198). The Jazz instrumentalist often transposes key signatures to effectively blend, as does Zora Neale Hurston. The following statement supports the Jazz artist and her enthusiastic improvisational means of collecting folk material.

I enjoyed collecting the folk-tales and I believe
the people from whom I collected them enjoyed the
telling of them, just as much as I did the hearing.
Once they got started, the "lies" just rolled and
the story-tellers fought for a chance to talk. It
was the same with the songs. The one thing to be
guarded against, in the interest of truth, was
over-enthusiasm. For instance, if a song was going
good, and the material ran out, the singer was apt
to interpolate pieces of other songs into it. The
only way you can know when that happens, is to know
your material so well that you can sense the violation.
Even if you do not know the song that is being used
for prodding, you can tell the change in rhythm and
tempo. The words do not count. The subject matter
in Negro folk-songs can be anything and go from love
to work, to travel, to food, to weather, to fight,
to demanding the return of a ring by a woman who
has turned unfaithful. The tune is the unity of the
thing. And you have to know what you are doing when
you begin to pass on that, because Negroes can fit
in more words and leave out more and still keep the
tune better than anyone I can think of. (143)

Therefore, we see how "she chose to demonstrate that
black life in America was much more creative and vibrant
than the surface poverty and one-dimensional acts of social
protest" (Jessie Carney Smith 544). There is a rich life of
song, story, lore in the African American community.
Perhaps this is part of folklorist purpose: to show the
multi-dimensional sides of a group. A predominate one-
dimensional side has a tendency to be exploited and
emphasized. However, Hurston, the folklorist and Jazz
strategist, true to these titles, shows us another way of
looking at things. The field is rich and valuable. Jessie
Carney Smith sees this through an autobiographical
perspective. Smith states

Hurston's training as an anthropologist is
evident in her narrative stance in Dust Tracks
in that she positions herself as a mediator
between her black American folk community and her white reading audience; she speaks in both the black folk idiom and the language of a graduate of Barnard College. She not only explains folk expressions, she incorporates folk narratives into her personal chronicle. In fact, Dust Tracks on a Road is as much a collection of folklore as Hurston’s Mules and Men and Tell My Horse. She demonstrates a commitment to explaining herself in her memoirs as a product of the large body of black American folklore. (546)

Dust Tracks is a collection of folklore. The autobiography represents folklore, but it is not the same kind of dynamic communication in a small group context. Perhaps this point can be seen in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Hurston features folk narrative dialect with the expressed purpose to clearly articulate the concerns of the African American community. In Their Eyes Joe Starks, Janie’s second husband, buys two hundred acres of land and wants to build a post office in Maitland or Eatonville, and Hicks, a townsperson, criticizes him. Coker, his friend, responds: "He’s liable tuh do it too, Hicks. Ah hope so any how. Us colored folks is too envious of one ‘nother. Dat’s how come us don’t get no further than us do. Us talks about de white man keepin’ us down! Shucks! He don’t have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down" (63). The narrative stance here is critical of the folk. The self-destructive behavior Coker sees is Hurston’s lament in Dust Tracks: "My People, My People!" The Jazz-Bebop artist, the critic, is revealed in autobiographical prose and narrative folk fiction. The Polk
County incident is one of a number of field research experiences Hurston presents. The folk expression "lying" is important in terms of field lore. This is Jazz narrative.

Jazz performance is a critical statement. In its rebellion of nonconformity, Jazz echoes its Blues origin through the improvisational act. Through Hurston's field experiences she learned about "what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so. . . ." Sometimes the findings are not so positive. She is left with the Blues lament "My People! My People!" Thus, this critical stance takes the Jazz strategist a step further to Bebop or Bop. Hurston's autobiography was published in 1942 before the Bebop era -- with roots in the 30's. This musical concept, though, is relevant to Hurston, the critic. Therefore, the Jazz strategist through further criticism and dispute transforms into the Bop artist, taking Jazz improvisation a step further. Its criticism is born out of love. She rebels against the condescending ways of her community through criticism. She is like the Bopster, who rebelled against the staid elements of Jazz. She laments her community's thoughts and actions based upon a white standard. In her reaction to observing the way "well-dressed and mannered Negroes" think of other "Negroes" on board a train with their shoes off, eating fish, bananas and peanuts and otherwise acting in a "crude" way, she notes:
Now, the well-mannered Negro is embarrassed by the crude behavior of the others. . . . It is like this: the well-bred Negro has looked around and seen America with his eyes. He or she has set himself to measure up to what he thinks of as the white standard of living. He is conscious of the fact that the Negro in America needs more respect if he expects to get any acceptance at all. Therefore, after straining every nerve to get an education, maintain an attractive home, dress decently, and otherwise conform, he is dismayed at the sight of other Negroes tearing down what he is trying to build up. It is said every day, 'And that good-for-nothing, trashy Negro is the one the white people judge us all by. They think we're all just alike. My People! My People! (157)

Hurston shows here that Jazz strategy, through a Blues concept, has been a valuable tool in changing the African American socio/economic status, self image, and overall progress. The hard work that it took to implement this strategy -- "straining every nerve" -- was no easy task. The difficult adjustment of reconstruction with no "buckets" to cast down and post-reconstruction with its Jim Crow laws put in place to inhibit mainstream inclusion and full citizenship was a monumental effort. Hurston pinpoints the separation that exists between the "well-dressed and mannered Negroes" and the less fortunate ones. She laments that the separation blocks unity and inhibits overall community growth -- intellectually, and socially. This is where the Bop artist finds contention. Thus, Bebop: "Like his African counterpart, the bebopper demonstrated extreme behavioral patterns. Frequently, he would turn his back on
the audience and ridicule them through a combination of his music and movements. Therefore, it was not surprising that society reacted by rejecting the beboppers' eccentric ways of life and his music" (Kaufman & Guckin 39). Perhaps it is not popular to show the shortcomings of a community that is oppressed from outside. Inside oppression is far more detrimental to any means of progress. Therefore, Hurston, in true Bop fashion, rebels against these shortcomings and failures.

Blues, as an innovator of Jazz stylings, thus becomes a part of Bebop characteristics. This concept illustrated in the Bop stylings of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk. Hurston predates Bop; this ensures the fact that she assumed a movement before its time. Hurston's greatness as a scholar and artist transcends time applications. Note here that the rebellion against what white musicians have done to Jazz is analogous to Hurston's rebellion against a segment of the black population.

The bebop era started as a black rebellion against "establishment" jazz of the 40's (swing era). The beboppers, led by Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk, were rebelling for a number of reasons. They were upset with what had happened to an art form that they as black musicians had given to America. They say the importance of improvisational solos (the basis of jazz) diminish and take a 'back seat' to the big band sound of the swing era. They were angry with the lack of racial sensitivity in requiring them to fight the so-called "yellow-skinned Jap" (World War II). They felt it was a white man's war and resented the hypocrisy of saving the "free world" in a racially segregated
army. They were also angry with the financial and social back seat imposed upon them relative to the white bands and vented their anger in unusual ways. (Kaufman & Guckin 38)

Like the Bop artist who rejects "established" movements within, for example, a genre of music, Hurston's criticisms of the African American community is her testimony of love. Her love is critical; without this love, the effort to criticize for improvement would be diminished. This rebellion extends across social, economic, and political lines. She cites class division and race solidarity as mainsprings for criticism. Too, the Bop artists rebelled against the political, socio/economic effects of swing that was prominent with white big bands. Their love for the art form gave birth to Bop's social, economic, and political critical expression. Hurston observes that

As soon as I could think, I saw that there is no such thing as Race Solidarity in America with any group. It is freely admitted that it does not exist among Negroes. Our so-called Race Leaders cry over it. Others accept it as a natural thing that Negroes should not remain an unmelting black knot in the body politic. Our interests are too varied. Personal benefits run counter to race lines too often for it to hold. The upper-class Negroes admit it in their own phrases. The lower-class Negroes say it with a tale. (159)

Hurston's sharp critical account of African American political thought was not necessarily popular. However, truth is generally an unpopular social dynamic. There are too many political and social circumstances that surround its position in the body politic. Hurston, the Bopster, is aware of this fact. She accepts the criticism of her stand.
She accepts the labels of "eccentric" and "controversial."
These are the badges Charlie's Parker and Thelonious Monk wore as acclaimed Bebop artists. Their artistic expressions reflected truth they perceived; Hurston also in like manner.

The bopster generally considered most immortal (jazz literature recognizes degrees of immortality) is, perhaps significantly, a musician not regarded as typical. He is the late alto saxophonist Charlie 'bird' Parker, a direct musical descendant of Lester Young, whose malaise he turned into wistfulness and sometimes despondence. Parker was a tortured soul and often played like one. There is in his music a certain nostalgia. Both jazz and the civilization of which it was a part had lost something, and Parker felt the loss. In some of his blues one gets the impression that he was trying to find his way home from a great distance. Perhaps he caught tantalizing glimpses of the lost homeland. (Grossman & Farrel 107)

Through musical expression, Charlie Parker's "tortured soul" responded to loss.

Likewise, Hurston perceived the loss of unity and love within the African American community. The family had become separated; division caused strife and Hurston knew that "a house divided, cannot stand." In her love and resentment she celebrates African American genius, inventiveness, and resourcefulness. Her love is illustrated here: "It was the genius of the Negro which had invented the steam engine, the cotton gin, the airbrake, and numerous other things -- but conniving white men had seen the Negro's inventions and run off and put them into practice before the Negro had a chance to do anything about it. Thus the white
man got credit for what the genius of the Negro brain had produced. Were it not for the envy and greed of the white man, the Negro would hold his rightful place — the noblest and the greatest man on earth" (161).

Cultural identity through Bop emphatically uses the improvisational tool of Jazz to effect outcome, make a statement, call attention to self among the group. Like Jazz improvisation, Bop extends the solo. Often pictured alone, individualized, the Bopster's statement is sharp, pointed, painful, however unpopular. Nevertheless, love is expressed in its most ideal form. Here, cultural identity through Jazz strategy and the improvisation of the Bop soloist shows the introspective Hurston prodding, picking, and discovering through folk exploration and self criticism. She relates:

Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any racial group as a whole. God made them duck by duck and that was the only way I could see them. I learned that skins were no measure of what was inside people. So none of the Race cliches meant anything any more. I began to laugh at both white and black who claimed special blessings on the basis of race. Therefore I saw no curse in being black, nor no extra favor by being white. I saw no benefit in excusing my looks by claiming to be half Indian. In fact, I boast that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was "not" an Indian Chief. (171)

Here the Bop artist cites an objective point of view on identity. However individual, the Bopster's criticism seeks to differentiate between the whole scheme of duality and its reference to identity. Hurston seeks a human identity based
on character -- an inner quality that makes up self identity. Perhaps self identity within the malaise of group identity characterizes the Bopster's search, improvising the solo. The Bop artist takes this different approach in self and group perception which showcases his or her individuality, love, and conviction. Bop gives one the strength to transcend popular opinion and reflect true heartfelt conviction. In the following statement, the Bop artist is critical based on this love and conviction:

I do not share the gloomy thought that Negroes in America are doomed to be stamped out bodacious-ly, nor even shackled to the bottom of things. Of course some of them will be tramped out, and some will always be at the bottom, keeping company with other bottom-folks. It would be against all nature for all the Negroes to be either at the bottom, top, or in between. It has never happened with anybody else. It is up to the individual. If you haven't got it, you can't show it. If you have got it, you can't hide it. That is one of the strongest laws God ever made. (Dust Tracks 172)

Hurston, as the Bop artist, emphasizes an individual's "internal drive" to effect change and success. Bop extended this expression with more improvisation, showcasing the solo -- soaring to new heights and tonalities. Hurston reveals this extended "internal drive" to express, however unpopular, a reaction to a social dynamic and replace it with "God's law" of individual effort and progress. Thus, through Jazz reflections channeled by Bop improvisation, Hurston's search for her identity, as well as her race, is complete. She reveals "So I sensed early, that the Negro race was not one band of heavenly love. There was stress
and strain inside as well as out. Being black was not enough. It took more than a community of skin color to make your love come down on you. That was the beginning of my peace" (170). Therefore, Hurston, in true Bop fashion can say "perhaps the seeking after the inner heart of truth will never cease in me" (Dust Tracks, 201).

Zora Neale Hurston's Dust Tracks on a Road is her testimony of identity, based on exploration of the folk and discovery of their songs, stories, and "gifts of the spirit." Through her field research, she utilized the "riffs" of Jazz to collect material. Her improvisational methods blended well with the people she studied. Moreover, Hurston's Jazz strategy saved her life while collecting folklore in Polk County, Florida. Educator, writer, Anthropologist, Hurston's "internal drive" to attain her goals transcended the inhibition of race prejudice and Jim Crow laws. Her individual search for truth and identity prompted an extended use of Jazz expression: Bebop. Always seen as ahead of her time, Hurston's bop style of improvising the solo reflected her true and genuine love for her African American community. This love was indeed critical; however, as with true bebop expression, it has conviction and strength to perform. Hurston perceived that there was disunity in the African American community and her Blues echoed "My People! My People!" Nevertheless, Bop created for her another way to express hope and life in her
community. Its critical nature purifies and cleanses negativity and hopelessness. Like Jazz, it acknowledges the "different path" traveled but, in addition, it creates an individual path that reflects truth, identity, and true love. Alice Walker, who has been instrumental in preserving Hurston's life and work sees her as the song stylist, reflecting a mood: "In my mind, Zora Neale Hurston, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith form a sort of unholy trinity. Zora belongs in the tradition of black women singers, rather than among the "literati," at least to me. There were the extreme highs and lows of her life, her undaunted pursuit of adventure, and her love of freedom. Like Billie and Bessie she followed her own road, believed in her own gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from 'common people" (xvii). And yet the contradictions that surrounded Hurston, the artist, scholar, writer were true to her Jazz-Bop lifestyle: A search for truth and identity amid chaos and confusion she presents in Dust Tracks. Robert Hemenway writes

An unmarked grave is a romantic, poignant resting place, but it represents a human tragedy. Zora Neale Hurston was a non tragic person, a woman who rejoiced in print about the beauty of being black. When her blues came, when bigots and rednecks and crackers and liberals and racial missionaries got her down, she retracted into a privacy that protected her sense of self; publicly, she avoided confrontation by announcing that she didn't look at a person's color, only one's worth. She personally believed in an integrated society, but she spent her career trying to preserve and celebrate black cultural practices. Her life testifies only for her particular black experience, but her career witnesses for contemporary black
authors. Why did such a writer end up living on food vouchers from the state of Florida? Why did her body lie in wait for subscriptions to pay for a funeral? The answers are as complicated as her art, as paradoxical as her person, as simple as the fact that she lived in a country that fails to honor its black artists. (6, 7)

The paradoxes in her life become the music that she exhibits in the autobiography. Yet, one wonders if the unabridged Hurston was allowed to openly present herself in *Dust Tracks* what would we really make of her. Hemenway states that "The manuscript, in short, exhibits a different kind of woman from the Eatonville girl allowed to go public in *Dust Tracks*, and it helps explain why that book is often perplexing. One is forced to ask what sort of reputation Zora Hurston might have today, had she not felt compelled to respond to a Lippincott editor's note, written across the bottom of one of her pages: 'Suggest eliminating international opinions as irrelevant to autobiography'" (288). Though Hurston's Eatonville experience which taught her the Jazz strategy of exploration, she discovered a new way of implementing the improvised solo: Bebop. This characterizes Zora Neale Hurston as a true innovator, who trail blazed paths. This is her legacy, love, testimony, and conviction.
There are a number of ways to define the Blues. In addition to those outlined in the introduction, the most common definition is that the Blues expresses a melancholy consciousness; it is a desperate attempt to replace emotional exasperation through the balm of song. However, it is important to note that this definition is largely subjective. The African American experience is communal and, yet, personal. Therefore, the Blues "may be at moments pessimistic or optimistic, personal or communal, angry or happy, protesting or resigned, analytical or casually unselfconscious. The task of discovering what they are and represent will force generalities that must ignore or dismiss as insignificant exceptions to those generalities. Defining the blues is a subjective task at bottom, one that must be approached carefully and sensitively" (Tracy 96).

The Blues is the African American experience. The Blues is an attempt to transcend circumstance. Steven Tracy notes "That imposition of form and granting of freedom may well find its most meaningful expression in the ability of the
blues to express the harsh limitations of this world while helping to transcend them" (71). The telling of the experience releases the spirit, the soul from its cage of hopelessness. Therefore, hope is ever present in the Blues. The Blues can also be a reaction to social and political pressures, abuses, and circumstances that unrelentingly tortures an individual or group.

There are many scholarly definitions of Blues, but it is useful to also look at definitions by the Blues singers themselves. To illustrate this "quiet revolt," the following is a Blues singer's definition of the Blues.

I've knowed guys that wanted to cuss out the boss and was afraid to go up to his face and tell him what they wanted to tell him. and I've heard a guy sing those things to the boss when he were out behind a wagon, hookin' up the horses. He'd make out like a horse stepped on his foot and he'd say, "Get off my foot, goddamit!" saying just what he wanted to say to his boss, only talkin' to the horse -- "you got no business doin' me like that! Get offa my foot!"

That's just my idea, Natchez, "Leroy broke in."
The blues is mostly revenge. You want to say something (and you know how we was situated so we wanted to), and so you sing it. Like a friend of mine. He was workin' down on a railroad section gang a long time ago. I don't remember when it was. Anyhow, this friend of mine looked at the boss lyin' up in the shade sleepin' while him an' his buddies was out there shakin' those ties. He wanted to say something about it, but he couldn't you know. So that give him the blues and he sung a little number about

Ratty, ratty section
Ratty, ratty crew
The captain's gettin' ratty, boys,
I b'lieve I'm gonna rat some, too.

Meanin' that he was signifyin and getting his revenge
through song. (Alan Lomax, "I Got The Blues," 475-476)

Therefore, among other things, the Blues is a revenge, a revolt, whether born out of personal catastrophe, emotion, or socio-political extremes.

The Blues is a statement. Alan Lomax adds that "Open the big book of the blues and you will find all the bitterness, all the frustration, all the anger, and all the heartbreak that accompany love when people live precariously in the slums" (473). It is a truthful expression that has the power to mend hopes and dreams that have been depressed. African Americans created the Blues out of their social, economic, and political place in American society. Steven Tracy states

for African-Americans, the blues are "a way of life," differentiated from the generic emotion because of the peculiar circumstances of African-American existence in the United States. A particular misery and sadness, a particular blues, unites African-Americans whose common heritage -- in Africa, slavery, and a theoretical freedom -- often provides a bond which is difficult for middle-class blacks to break. That bond implies . . . a shared need to deal with the tension created by America's theoretical democracy in conflict with a systematic network of racist attitudes that were (and are) often granted the authority of law. (60)

This "quiet revolt" is again evident in Blues definition. The Bluesman seeks out those ways in which empowerment can be attained. Tracy also cites Janheinz Jahn's discovery that "the blues is an assertion of autonomy and the desire to consolidate one's power in a world where one's power is
in danger of being lost" (63). Thus, the Blues characterized in African American life was produced from these social, economic, and political dynamics of American life. Fundamentally, "you sing about things you want to do or things you want to know or — things that really have happened to you" (Lomax 475). The song becomes an expression of truth — experience. The African American community created the Blues to voice this experience. As a Bluesman notes "they was really expressin' their feelings from their heart the only way they knowed how" (Lomax 476). Blues gave the African American a way of "fingering the jagged edge" of experience; the Blues served as a strategy to control an environment that he or she felt powerless. It was produced to meet the challenges of everyday disappointment and disillusion. Paul Oliver says " . . . so this brief outline may place the blues singers in the contexts of the times and places where they lived and worked, and sang, and sometimes died; the mind's eye might clothe these instant images of the camera with flesh and blood" (7). The Blues documents a historical place — metaphorically; it assumes a state of mind or mood that displaces an experience by illustrating through song its jagged memory. Therefore, the Bluesman is in control of the situation, and even more importantly, himself. Oliver notes through the blues a man could sing about himself as he did in the fields; he could be his own hero. He could brag a little, he could make up a story
about himself, he could wish himself into a situation - leaving home for better conditions or where there were no responsibilities. Or he could tell of the unhappiness of yesterday and work it out of his system. The blues was a way of singing and playing; it was a state of mind. The blues singer didn't reason himself into a different frame of mind, he sang himself into it. And when the blues had gone there was still the blues to sing, to amuse himself, or his companions, or to entertain at the local juke.

Therefore, for the African American, the Blues became an essential part of life and living. Like his or her cultural heritage, the art imitates life. It is mimetic. Blues can also be didactic expressing political messages. Blues becomes a living witness to experience. The Blues, like all African American musical expressions, was created out of the slave past. The experience of slavery gave birth to the sacred and secular musical forms -- Spirituals and Blues respectively -- that culturally identifies what place the African American sees him or herself in the milieu of the American experience. Popularized in post-reconstruction, the Blues expresses aspirations toward redefining self through experience -- racially, socially. Alan Lomax says that "Out of the lonesome field hollers, out of the chain-gang chants, out of the full-throated choruses of the road builders, the clearers of swamps, the lifters and the toters -- out of the biting irony, the power and savage strength and anger of worksongs -- sprang the blues. Here was music with its tap root in African singing -- Africa, the continent of the worksong. The worksong flowered
under slavery and put forth its thorns after reconstruction" (475). The African past supports the African American musical tradition and heritage.

Celebrated African American poet and writer Langston Hughes through The Big Sea takes us, along with him, on a journey of the Blues. His autobiography is the quintessential Blues statement. Hughes allows his audience to experience the perils and disappointments of a young black man whose growth characterizes the Blues statement through family separation, African American duality, and the aspiration to become a writer. Steven Tracy reports that

From his letters, essays, autobiographies, and recordings, it is easy to see that Langston Hughes had exposure to various kinds of blues, especially in the years leading up to the publication of his first two volumes of poetry. Because the blues he heard in his earliest years influenced Hughes to write the kind of blues poems that he did, a survey of his experiences with blues and blues performers will make it easier to establish Hughes's primary interests and concerns, giving us insight into the ideas he expressed about blues in his prose and the effects of his understanding of the blues condition on his poetry. (104)

Thus, Hughes direct experience with Blues connects the man, the autobiography, and the artist. Tracy's analysis merges the poet with the music; however, its direct influence is revealed by the poet in his words. "Speaking in 1959, Hughes discussed the impact of those early blues:

At any rate, when I was a kid in Kansas City very often I used to hear the blues. There were blind guitar players who would sing the blues on street
corners. These were people plunking the blues on beat up old pianos. That was of course before the days of the jukebox and the radio. In those days, almost everybody who could afford to have a piano had one, and played them in their homes. And so you heard a lot of music. Well, at any rate, I was very much attracted to the blues. I remember even now some of the blues verses that I used to hear as a child in Kansas City. And so I, in my early beginnings at poetry writing, tried to weave the blues into my poetry. (Tracy 105)

In addition, while in New Orleans, during Summer break from Lincoln, Hughes recalls the Blues in a Rampart street apartment:

There was no piano, but she played marvelous blues records on an old victrola: Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson, and Ma Rainey. And sometimes a wild guitar player would come in off the street and plunk a while, providing somebody bought him a drink or two. In Baton Rouge and New Orleans I heard many of the blues verses I used later in my short stories and my novel. (290)

Therefore, I will show that the author, as he depicts himself in The Big Sea, was directly influenced by the Blues. Arnold Rampersad shows how the music is directly reflected in the man and the poet. He states "Just as the classically trained black musician Scott Joplin had labored to notate ragtime in order to enshrine its beauty as art, so Hughes worked to link the lowly blues to formal poetry in order that its brilliance might be recognized by the world. He knew immediately that in so honoring the blues, he had done something unprecedented in literature" (66). The following Blues poem "Young Gal’s Blues" by Hughes supports Rampersad’s analysis:

I’m gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma friend, Miss Cora Lee.
Gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma dear friend Cora Lee.
Cause when I'm dead some
Body'll have to walk behind me.

I'm going to de po'house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
Goin' to de po' house
To see ma old Clew.
When I'm old an' ugly
I'll want to see somebody, too.

De po' house is lonely
An' de grave is cold.
O, de po' house is lonely,
De graveyard grave is cold.
But I'd rather be dead than
To be ugly an' old.

When love is gone what
Can a young gal do?
When love is gone, O,
What can a young gal do?
Keep on a-lovin' me, daddy,
Cause I don't want to be blue.
(Book of Negroe Folkiore, 555)

The traditional Blues song structure (twelve bar, second line repeats first, a new third) is clearly apparent, even though the poem is printed in six line stanzas. The poet acknowledges the Blues song form here. Later, I will present other examples where the poet, his autobiographical prose narrative, and his art reflect the man and his mission through Blues that affirms African American cultural identity. Hughes' Blues journey is an affirmation of self through the personal, creative expression to be free.

Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri; however, he "grew up mostly in Lawrence, Kansas." Hughes' Blues was created by observing his family, torn
through divorce, trying to survive the chaos of uncertainty and Jim Crow. Since the Blues contains both expressions of melancholy and hope, the unyielding pride of his grandmother typified the internal strategies Blues articulated in art. The Blues poet in Hughes has its roots in his grandmother's steadfastness and strength to overcome the psychological impairments of racism. Hughes cites "You see, my grandmother was very proud, and she would never beg or borrow anything from anybody. She . . . held me on her lap and told me long, beautiful stories about people who wanted to make the Negroes free . . . ." (17) Here, young Hughes' observation enlivens in his psyche a Blues statement that would be revealed years later in his art. The crucial point here is that The Big Sea 1940 chronicles a life that epitomizes a musical tradition that identifies a people through constant observation and records those observations through narrative and poetry. Thereby, cultural identity is expressed in the very theme, topic, and movement of the singer-soloist, writer-Blues singer. Hughes' grandmother instilled in him, perhaps unconsciously, the Blues statement that gave young Hughes the survival tools of hope and self confidence. This "practical" musical tradition responds to every day reality. James Cone points out that "The blues are about black life and the sheer earth and gut capacity to survive in an extreme situation of oppression" (108). Thus, forebearance is a crucial ingredient in Blues. Any attempt
to define this musical tradition would take into consideration the history of African Americans: the Blues is a lyrical expression of the African American experience. Hughes would recall "Through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. When my grandmother died, I didn't cry, either. Something about my grandmother's stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything" (17). Thus Hughes recalls what would now be defined as Blues. Its mobility and strategy to aspire -- "life moved, moved heroically toward an end" -- reinforces the Jazz component of the Blues statement. The "heroic" move toward an end implies an improvisational strategy that was born out of a Blues consciousness. Pride is here: "Nobody ever cried." Because of the fact that Hughes' grandmother's tales reinforced a strategy for life, in particular black life, young Hughes learned to "work, or scheme, or fought." Later, we shall see these Blues elements in Hughes' life. It is clearly evident in his poetry: "Troubled Woman."

She stands
In the quiet darkness,
This troubled woman
Bowed by
Weariness and pain
Like an
Autumn flower
In the frozen rain,
Like a
Wind-blown autumn flower
That never lifts its head
Again. (Selected Poems, 77)

Bowed, yet "like an Autumn flower in the frozen rain,"
Hughes' poem creates the Blues statement. Indeed, Hughes'
grandmother was a "troubled" woman who stood straight up
against the forces that would destroy her physically and
mentally. However, hope is revealed in his grandmother's
strength because, unlike the flower, she "lifts her head."

Hughes' grandmother's stories can be viewed as Blues
solos. The individual reflects upon his or her life which
may, indeed, be the experiences of the group. The ever
present autobiographical "I" remains the central part of
Blues definition. The "I" may be autobiographical, and the
self may be expressing group sentiment. In the following
example, "Hard Time Blues," the Blues lyrics expresses the
solo or "I" but also the "I" reflects group attitudes.

1. Well, now I say, you people, oh, you know times is hard,
   Well, you know now, people, woh, times is hard,
   Well, now while the depressions is on, look like me an'
   my baby want to part.

2. Work done got scarce, I'm tryin' to make a livin',
   peoples, I know,
   Mm, work done got scarce, tryin' to make a livin',
   peoples, I know,
   Seem like my baby, she want to put me out,
   she want to drive me from her do'.

3. I ain't just all alone, there is others too,
   I'm not all alone, there is others too,
   I see both white and black walkin' the road,
   tryin' to find something to do.

4. Well, we don't know, we don't know how everything is
   goin' to be,
   Well, we don't know, we don't know how everything is
   goin' to be,
I say the way this segregation goin' on,  
All I can say, Lord, have mercy on me. (Oster 205, # 65)

Clearly the "I" or Blues soloist expresses the general problem of being out of work during the depression: both blacks and whites suffer from unemployment. The implication here is that the African American is consistently out of work; whereas, now whites feel the same unfortunate circumstance, but worse for blacks: "I'm not all alone, there is others too, I see both white and black walkin' the road tryin' to fine somethin' to do." Certainly, too, the autobiographical "I" here voices the group's circumstances: "I ain't just all alone." For Langston Hughes, his Blues narrative extends the autobiographical "I" through recollection and observation, incorporating the group's emotions and feelings. Jeff Todd Titon notes that the Blues...

asserted that one need not personally undergo the experiences related in a blues song; the singer often can take as his song material occurrences that have befallen others... blues singers do not always sing about experiences they themselves have undergone, because the assumption that blues lyrics are factually autobiographical remains common in blues scholarship. Yet, like autobiographies, blues lyrics contain an 'I' who is a character, an actor, a persona created by the singer. (44)

Hughes' grandmother, the portrait of the Blues statement, acts as a kind of icon etched spiritually in his memory. As an extension of the Blues, Hughes autobiographical "I" becomes the "I" of his father's and mother's personalities; one, steadfast in assuming a place where racism does not
depress advancement, and the other, battling to overcome racial impediments that necessitated the Blues journey of uncertainty and wander. Langston Hughes' Blues sustains from this parental base. His observations become animated and alive in his Blues art.

If we take a closer look at many of Hughes' poems, we can see the Blues characteristics of the journey, melancholy, and, yet, hope. His mother possessed these attributes as he described her wandering to improve life for herself and her son. He states "my mother, who worked, always traveled about a great deal, looking for a better job" (14). Hughes' "Mother to son" best incorporates the young man's observation of a mother who "fought and schemed" to survive and a grandmother who taught him that "it is useless to cry about anything." I think Hughes draws from his observation of a mother who taught him that "it is useless to cry about anything." He allows us, his audience, to feel pain, sorrow, and, yet, hope for a better tomorrow as he did. These observations allowed Hughes the ability to look at life through Blues spectacles: acknowledging the pain of injustice, yet carrying forth the stamina and steadfastness to face the obstacles Jim Crow society imposed. He writes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me aint been no crystal stair.
Its had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor -
Bare.
But all the time
I 'se been a - climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now -
For I 'se still goin', honey,
I 'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
(Sel ected Poems, 187)

In recognizing the African American musical traditions as reflecting cultural identity, "Mother to Son" -- the Blues statement -- encompasses the history of the African American. It's all there. The "tacks" and "splinters" of the slave past establishes the secular tradition of practical experience. Reconstruction and Post-reconstruction integrates the hopes and aspirations of African Americans: "I 'se been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark." The most important Blues ingredient -- hope -- is expressed with the forthrightness and power that has been the foundation of African American progress: "Don't you fall now, For I 'se still goin', honey." The singer takes a chance to relive a past that was often brutal and painful. Therefore, the Blues soloist risks and chances. James Cone reinforces this illustration. He states "The blues are true because they combine art and life, poetry and experience, the symbolic and the real. They are an artistic response to
the chaos of life. And to sing the blues, it is necessary to experience the historical realities that created them" (115). I mentioned that indeed the Blues is the secular part of the Spiritual: living in the practical reality of human survival. The every day challenges of uncertainties and social and political injustice articulated in the Blues ironically are life giving and life affirming. The badge the African American wears with each articulated Blue note revives and affirms life and living. The Blues statement is an affirmation of tolerance, survival, and meeting and overcoming challenge. Cone asserts "The blues are an expression of fortitude in the face of a broken existence. They emphasize the will to be, despite non-being as symbolized in racism and hate" (117). Langston Hughes sought this truth through art reinforced with what he had known, the Blues. Note the following Blues narration: "And me growing up living with my grandmother, with aunts who were really no relation, with my mother in rented rooms, or alone trying to get through high school -- always some kind of crisis in our lives. My father, permanently in Mexico during all those turbulent years, represented for me the one stable factor in my life. He at least stayed put" (36). Hughes' Blues stems from a splintered and dispersed family unit. It is important to devote considerable study into his family and home background to comprehend the poet, the man, and the forthright exponent of the Blues in art and
narrative. Hughes' cultural statement indeed identified all he observed and knew. Truth can be the only result here.

Blues lyrics, therefore, take on a new dimension. Even though all art is comprehensive, that is, they express and reveal cultural heritage and identity, Blues lyrics, as part of song form, add an even more expressive and emotional response to social or political concerns. For example, Langston Hughes' mother and father sought out a place where each could live in harmony with their environment. His mother survived from one job to another in several cities, while James Hughes' called Mexico home, away from the racial turmoil of his American home. "Tired As I Can Be" is a Blues song by Bessie Jackson (Lucille Bogan). The lyrics to this song capture the intense feeling of rejection (job to job, Mexico/home) and an affirmation of self and place:

I worked all the winter
   And I worked all fall
I got to wait till spring
   To get my ashes hauled
   And now I'm tired
   Tired as I can be
   And I'm going back home
   Where these blues don't worry me.
(Sackheim 45).

Hughes' mother, an itinerant job seeker, reflects African American life in Jim Crow America. She can relate to the Blues lyric "I worked all the winter, And I worked all fall, And now I'm tired." Hughes' father, escaping the restrictive environment of Jim Crow, sought social and political refuge in Mexico, however not without a
personality that Hughes notes was filled with self hate. Thus, the psychological baggage of racism could not be left at home. James Hughes, as we shall see, fell victim. Perhaps the precept "What affects one, affects all" pertaining to the African American community explains Blues definition accurately. No one is truly free no matter what social ladder one stands on or climbs, until all are free. James Hughes could not escape this "psychological" truth -- not even in Mexico. We shall see this precept rising again in young Langston Hughes' life, later, during his self reflective journey in Europe and Africa.

The Big Sea is largely an introspective journey of a young man learning about himself in relation to the world. Hughes' father and mother played an important part in this journey. Even though his mother reflected African American place within the confines of Jim Crow, his father introduced him to a much larger world of possibilities, where personality, intellect, and character were the determinants to advancement and social contribution. Hughes proudly states "In my mind I pictured my father as a kind of strong, bronze cowboy, in a big Mexican hat, going back and forth from his business in the city to his ranch in the mountains, free -- in a land where there were no white folks to draw the color line, and no tenements with rent always due -- just mountains and sun and cacti: Mexico!" (36). However, this exultation of spirit and celebration would diminish as
young Hughes got to know his father. The Blues is both anticipation and reaction. Knowing beforehand about a problem prepares the Blues soloist to better perceive the problem in its own context; however, the Blues, perhaps, is best illustrated from reaction -- It takes on meanings based upon actual actions and circumstances. Thus, for young Hughes, his Blues became more intense and clearly defined once he knew the real James Hughes.

My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro. He disliked all of his family because they were Negroes and remained in the United States, where none of them had a chance to be much of anything but servants -- like my mother, who started out with a good education at the University of Kansas, he said, but had sunk to working in a restaurant, waiting on niggers, when she wasn't in some white woman's kitchen. My father said he wanted me to leave the United States as soon as I finished high school, and never return -- unless I wanted to be a porter or a red cap all my life. (39)

Here illustrates the anticipation -- reaction theory of Blues statement and definition. The "strong, bronze Cowboy" Hughes pictured of his father, turned out to be, in reality, an unfeeling, disenchanted, person ruled by self hatred. Although James Hughes became a successful businessman and landowner in Mexico, he had failed in self love. But, perhaps, James Hughes sought and actually achieved a measure of material and social/political success and castigated those who cried racism for their lack of advancement. Essentially, he did what he had to do in life to survive; he expected his African American community in the United States to do the same. They, however, did not measure up to his
standards of surviving Jim Crow. He escaped to survive. His American community stayed to fight the battle of full citizenship, respect, and opportunity. Which, in reality, is more forthrightly strong and endurable? Today, the African American community truly stands on the shoulders of those who struggled and survived a Jim Crow system that constantly fought against such advancement and survival. We, today, are their heirs. Thus, the question is answered. The Blues statement is thus illustrated and, even more, defined.

Langston Hughes' narrative description of his life in relation to African American life as exhibited through his family background tell the Blues, or it tells how a young poet becomes heir apparent to a musical tradition that reached its height during his lifetime. James Cone's definition notes

Black music, then, is not an artistic creation for its own sake; rather it tells us about the feeling and thinking of African people, and the kinds of mental adjustments they had to make in order to survive in an alien land. For example, the work songs were a means of heightening energy, converting labor into douces and games, and providing emotional excitement in an otherwise unbearable situation. The emphasis was on free, continuous, creative energy as produced in song. A similar functional character applied to the seculars, ballads, spirituals, as well as the blues. (109)

Langston Hughes had to make an adjustment in Toluca, Mexico. Prior to this, the mental adjustment, which characterizes the Blues, had to be made with his mother. Often, the highest expression of love is allowing and supporting a
loved one. Nevertheless, the Blues more often were about antagonism between men and women. Yet, if that means physical separation, that support should be there. Otherwise, love turns into dependency, insecurity, selfishness, based on condition. Langston Hughes' mother challenged Hughes in his quest for freedom. Already angered by the thought of him living with his father in Mexico, Hughes' mother challenged his "Blues" decision. The term "Blues" decision is of major importance; when one makes a decision that would ultimately hurt a loved one, although that hurt is based on selfishness and insecurity, that decision is going to project the Blues. To illustrate: While in a Cleveland restaurant, Hughes told his mother that he was going to visit his father in Mexico. His mother's reaction was one of disgust and heartbreak, again, a love based on insecurity: "Go with him! 'she cried over the counter. 'Go on -- and leave me! Go ahead!' . . . 'Hard as I've worked and as little as you care about me!' (38). The boy takes his first steps into manhood with the Blues decision. As with the Blues, this decision carries with it hope. This passage also illustrates the gender conflict in the Blues. Hughes writes "By now, some customers came in and my mother had to wait on them. I sat on a stool at the counter a long time, but she kept walking by me silently to the coffee urns, the steam table, or to the kitchen. I wanted her to say something to me. But finally it was time
to go. So I went" (38). Langston Hughes' affirmation of self is illustrated here in his Blues. It was necessary that he take this journey to affirm his sense of manhood and existence.

The Blues journey starts with a need to express the self, its emotions, thoughts, and aspirations. Self-definition takes on a much wider dimension here. Not only did Hughes engage in the opportunity to learn his place in the world outside of the United States, he also asserted his independence that was going to identify the man and his art. Therefore, Hughes' affirmation of self identity was approached from a Blues decision that characterized his life. Thus, for young Hughes, taking the initiative to go to Mexico affirms his being and his perception to reality. In the sense that the Blues expresses pain, sorrow and hope, he faced the Blues decision "But finally it was time to go. So I went." The decision, as illustrated, contains the Blues message. Hughes' "goodbye song" truly incorporated the stoicism of feeling and projected a determination to affirm self inspite of challenge.

In the following Blues, "Leaving Town Blues," Ishman Bracey captures the "stoic" feelings of the Blues. The affirmation of self is inherent in them.

Now I tell you mama now
I'm sure gonna leave this town
Now I tell you mama now
I'm sure gonna leave this town
'Cause I been in trouble even since I sot my suitcase down
Now you don't b'lieve I'm leaving
just watch the train I'm on
Now you don't b'lieve I'm leaving
just watch the train I'm on
And you don't b'lieve I'm looking
just count the days I'm gone

... 'fore I stay here mama 'm'
be treated this-a-way
Mama 'fore I stay here now and
be treated this-a-way
Now I'll let some freight train
throw me every day
(Sackheim 161).

Thus, Langston Hughes had the confidence to assert and
affirm self despite the overwhelming "apron string" tug his
mother held. For Hughes, the symbol of the train as a
metaphor for freedom, manhood, and expression became his
beacon of hope. Leaving home theme in Blues is apparent
here.

Langston Hughes' Blues took on added dimensions as he
got to know his father more. While on his way to Toluca,
with his father, he noticed "my father had a great contempt
for all poor people. He thought it was their own fault that
they were poor" (41). It is interesting that Hughes
juxtaposes the personality of the man and his success.
Hughes cites

Because it is very hard for a Negro to make money in
the United States, since so many jobs are denied him,
so many unions and professional associations are
barred to him, so many banks will not advance him
loans, and so many insurance companies will not insure
his business, my father went to Cuba and Mexico, where
he could make money quicker. He had had legal training
in the South, but could not be admitted to the bar
there. In Mexico he was admitted to the bar and
practiced law. He acquired property in Mexico City and
a big ranch in the hills. He lent money and foreclosed on mortgages. (39)

This interesting contrast shows Blues development in Hughes. He saw how his father "forgot" his past and the struggle he had to wage in order to seek freedom in Mexico. That is, his father blames the person for his or her failures instead of society; he forgot that his opportunities in the United States were curtailed by Jim Crow racism. Young Hughes questions his father's outlook and criticism. The Blues further reveals itself when young Hughes saw his father taking on an oppressive personality akin to American whites who displayed racial hatred. He maintains that his father said "greasers and niggers would never get anywhere because they were too religious, always praying" (42). From this observation and background, Hughes' Blues developed its own personality and life style; that is, his observation of the African American community was shadowed by Blues lens. When composing his poems, Hughes incorporated all that he had known and experienced. The result was inevitably a Blues vision and application. Barry Lee Pearson makes an interesting comment on this social dynamic. He maintains The blues artist as truth-teller draws on his awareness of those things most likely encountered by his audience, using personalization as a performance technique" (Sounds So Good To Me 131).

The makings of the Blues poet were born out of experience. If, indeed, experience is truth, Hughes' art
revealed a cultural identity that he had known and observed. His first published poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was written outside of St. Louis on board a train enroute to Mexico; Hughes second visit with his father in Toluca. Jessie Fauset, managing editor of the "Crisis," publication organ of the NAACP (National Association For The Advancement of Colored People), published Hughes' poem in 1921. It employs all that he had known; all that he had experienced. The poem became a soliloquy for historical Blues poetry. And, again, Hughes had to make the Blues decision when leaving his mother, a second time, which contributed to the poem's Blues. He relates "My mother let me go to the station alone, and I felt pretty bad when I got on the train. I felt bad for the next three or four years, to tell the truth, and those were the years when I wrote most of my poetry. (For my best poems were all written when I felt the worst. When I was happy, I didn't write anything)" (54). Here, Hughes reveals even more clearly why he became the Blues poet. The decision to leave his mother again was a decision to advance, go forth into the unknown. The autobiographical "I" here not only benefits self but all involved. Thus, the Blues soloist expresses self while acknowledging other selves -- mother, father -- and the future. The symbolism of the train is the personification of advancement -- self, group, community -- though not in traditional Blues where it meant escape, but with a
recognition that things could be the same in the new place. It is Hughes' "performance technique." Coupled with his family problems and Jim Crow restrictions, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" becomes the essential Blues lyrics in poetry form. Hughes prepares the reprise: "But about my going to join my father, my mother acted much as she had done the year before. I guess it is the old story of divorced parents who don't like each other, and take their grievances out on the offspring. I got the feeling then that I'd like to get away from home altogether, both homes, and that maybe if I went to Mexico one more time, I could go to college somewhere in some new place, and be on my own" (53). Here we see and, perhaps, feel Hughes frustration and desire to be free -- to soar beyond boundaries and socially imposed limits. The young poet's Jim Crow experience was similar to James Weldon Johnson's experience. Both experiences occurred in a passenger train. Hughes notes:

crossing Texas, I was sitting alone at a small table in the diner, when a white man came in and took the seat just across the table from mine. . . . He stared at me a long time. Then, suddenly, with a loud cry, the white man jumped up and shouted: 'You're a nigger, aint you?' And rushed out of the car as if pursued by a plague.

I grinned. I had heard before that white Southerners never sat down to table with a Negro, but I didn't know until then that we frightened them that badly. (50)

Hughes uses the comic element here detailing the Blues tale. However, "less amusing" was a St. Louis experience. While waiting for a train, Hughes ordered an ice cream soda. The
clerk responded: "'Are you a Mexican or a Negro?'" I said: 'Why?'
'Because if you're a Mexican, I'll serve you,' he said.
'If you're colored, I won't.'
'I'm colored,' I replied. The clerk turned to wait on someone else. I knew I was home in the U.S.A.'" (51).
The Blues reaction in overcoming Jim Crow absurdities all contributes to the Blues poet's art expressions.

As I have mentioned, Mexico for young Hughes presented him that opportunity to explore self in relation to place in a much wider world. Here, the longing for freedom ('be on my own') prepares the Blues in the poet. It captures and brings together the poet, his history, his racial history, and his hope for a better life. The old adage "we are the sum of all who we have met or known" rings through Hughes' explanation of how he composed the poem. Arnold Rampersad observes "The sense of beauty and death, of hope and despair, fused in his imagination. A phrase came to him, then a sentence" (39). The Blues is here. It is clearly articulated through observation. In the poet's own words, he tells the story:

I had been in to dinner early that afternoon on the train. Now it was just sunset, and we crossed the Mississippi, slowly, over a long bridge. I looked out the window of the Pullman at the great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the South, and I began to think what that river, the old Mississippi, had meant to Negroes in the past -- how to be sold down the river was the worst fate that could overtake a
slave in times of bondage. Then I remembered reading how Abraham Lincoln had made a trip down the Mississippi on a raft to New Orleans, and how he had seen slavery at its worst, and had decided within himself that it should be removed from American life. Then I began to think about other rivers in our past—the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa—and the thought came to me: "I've known rivers". (55)

In detailing the mood, circumstance, and history of African American place the author's Blues tells a story—a story of pain, suffering and yet, triumph. It is essentially an American victory. The morality and implication detailed in Lincoln's decision, the historic symbolism of the "muddy" Mississippi river, and the poet's African heritage sum up the Blues statement: "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" as a comprehensive Blues that incorporates the social dynamic of race pride, love of country, and hope for a bright and better future.

I've Known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (55).

All that Langston Hughes has known, all that he has experienced, and all that he has observed is here in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The young author's perception into the American social and political landscape is shaped through "Blues" lens. He recalls the glorious past -- a
history rich in human endeavor, symbolism of the African river -- a strength he draws from with roots mighty and ancient, and an American identity -- a new home that has the potential to be great morally, socially, and politically. The poet exclaims that he has always existed. His blood is as old as human existence. He has and always will be a part of a world that possesses beauty and love. Here it is easy to feel Hughes' pain; yet, hope is maintained through faith and change: "I've seen its muddy bosom (Mississippi river) turn all golden in the sunset." The blood of the Mississippi stains America. It reminds the poet of a dangerous and painful past (slavery); of lynchings and Southern race hate. However, the Mississippi has the potential to free itself from what it has symbolized: "turn all golden in the sunset." This poem established Langston Hughes as the Blues poet. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is a lyrical poem. Hughes essentially details the "souls of black folk" and secures identity culturally, through African roots, socially through place in the new American home, and through blood -- the life source of human make up. Tracy notes that Hughes was literally a poor boy a long way from home. The blues expressed his loneliness, his desire to get in touch with his people and himself again, his hope, determination, and pride in people who accomplish what they can as well as they can despite limitations, even if it is crying. These were jazz musicians, but they were digging deep into their blues roots to express the blues that stayed with them wherever they went. These were memories of something they had all felt before,
perhaps were still feeling, even if they were a long way from home. (111-112)

Like the Jazz musician, the Blues soloist expresses a freedom that society depresses and restrains. The soloist moves forward an inner strength and strategy that overcomes socially imposed limitations. This victory is achieved through the creative energy of Blues story tradition. It tends to effect a way out of bondage. It is freedom expressed through hope and, indeed, love. Langston Hughes had this gift. He expressed through "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" a faith and hope in African American survival because it had been demonstrated through each toil and struggle. The victory can be achieved. Steven Tracy says "Part of that ability to sustain is apparently the way the blues help him keep his identity. Even in singing the blues, he is singing about his life, about the way that he and other blacks have to deal with white society" (222).

Here we see how closely related the African American musical tradition is to identity. Cultural identity is achieved through the inner expression of the soloist. Certainly the soloist's song can be autobiographical in detailing an experience, a history, or metaphorical using a failed love relationship to relate racial oppression. The soloist can also reflect group concerns and attitudes; he or she becomes spokesperson for the group. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, "it is that tradition that helps keep the singer alive and gives him his identity" (Tracy 222).
Langston Hughes indeed celebrates himself and African American heritage. The feelings extend the autobiographical act, the solo, and overall artistic expression. Hughes connects with this feeling to acknowledge a commonality. These Blues stanzas are rooted in experience, observation, and performance. The Blues musician, through the pen, creates a total portrait of the past, present, and future of African American aims. The African past names both African and American rivers; the American present shows a dignity ("My soul has grown deep like the rivers"), and with this dignity, there's hope for future life and survival. Amiri Baraka once noted that "Langston is the Jazz Poet! The constant communicator of Blues. He is the singer, the philosopher, the folk and urban lyricist. His poetry is still one of the touchstones of American civilization, in its originality feeling, and open commitment to social transformation" (The Big Sea, foreword). Thus, this is the essential Blues. It is comprehensive. Hughes can rightly be labeled the Jazz and Blues Poet. He communicates hope and aspirations of an oppressed people. The feeling is constant. Creating such an art is spontaneous. He writes "If there is a chance to put the poem down then, I write it down. If not, I try to remember it until I get to a pencil and paper; for poems are like rainbows: they escape you quickly" (56). Too, the music escapes quickly. Hughes identifies himself as a musician, creating a feeling that
has been a part of his life since birth. His ancestors possessed the music. They expressed it sacredly through Spirituals or slave songs. He continues the expression that responds to his experiences and observations. We shall see later where this acknowledged Blues musician of the Harlem Renaissance spoke Blues and Jazz in an era that celebrated black artistic expression, development, and achievement.

Langston Hughes loved the African American community. His primary desire was to be an integral part of this community. Hughes made the choice to attend Columbia University rather than to study in Europe. In Mexico, his father wanted him to attend the best schools possible: "He wanted me to go to Switzerland to college, perhaps to Basle, or one of the cantons where one could learn three languages at once, French, German, and Italian, directly from the people. Then he wanted me to go to a German engineering school. Then come back to live in Mexico" (62). Nevertheless, the Blues decision is made. Hughes' overwhelming desire to be among African Americans was central in his Blues decision. He recalls "I suggested Columbia in New York -- mainly because I wanted to see Harlem" (62). This love was to be characteristic of the author throughout life. In Harlem, Hughes captured the pulse of the black community through Blues expression. Through observation and participation, the author chose to be a part of the Harlem scene -- its parties, entertainment,
and art. Later, we shall see how Hughes became a central literary model for others in the Jazz age of Harlem. He saw the community, like his observation of his family, through Blues. Hughes' love for the African American community is illustrated here: "I had an overwhelming desire to see Harlem. More than Paris, or the Shakespeare country, or Berlin, or the Alps, I wanted to see Harlem, the greatest Negro city in the world. 'Shuffle Along' had just burst into being, and I wanted to hear Florence Mills sing. So I told my father I'd rather go to Columbia than to Switzerland" (62). Hughes' Blues statement shows the cultural richness of Harlem. A place that produced Florence Mills and the Broadway musical "Shuffle Along." The economic potential of Harlem was obvious. Jim Crow laws segregated the black community into the acceptable "uptown" area and thus became a culturally and politically rich and vibrant city within a city. Yet, African American duality is illustrated here. Being American citizens forced into designated segregated areas conjures up, again, the question of full citizenship.

Langston Hughes' poetry must be Blues. "Third Alley Blues" by Iva Smith can illustrate Hughes' Blues decision regarding place, location -- the desire to find home.

I just want to get back
to Birmingham
I just want to get back
to Birmingham
I got a gang in Third Alley
don't know where I am
I'd rather be in Third Alley
without a dime
Than to be in Chicago
simply wasting my time (Sackheim 42).

These lyrics to "Third Alley Blues" associate the soloist with a longing for home. Home, here, is Birmingham where everything the singer knows and is familiar with reside. Home is this familiarity with place and people. Hughes' home -- Harlem -- gives him that same opportunity to be "home" as does Birmingham for the Blues soloist in "Third Alley Blues", even though the soloist desires to return home after disappointment with a northern city. Hughes wants to be a part of the vibrant creative energy of the African American community. The music is there: Jazz, Blues, life.

After the poet moved out of Hartley Hall at Columbia, he took additional steps to declare his independence. At twenty, Hughes was on his own at home in the Harlem community. That summer, he began to work at a number of jobs, experiences that contributed to his Blues. The first was a truck-garden farm on Staten Island. His mother, at the time, had gone back to Cleveland. After a satisfactory season with the Greek-owned garden farm, Hughes delivered flowers for a Mr. Thorley, a job he didn't like very well. Later, during that Fall, Hughes found a job as mess boy aboard a ship. This was his opportunity to, in his words, "see the world." Blues is characterized by journey. Hughes, in essence, wanted to take an internal journey while seeing the world. "The Weary Blues" resulted, "about a piano-player I heard in Harlem."
Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway . . . .
He did a lazy sway . . . .
To the tune O'those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan-
"Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Ain't got nobody but ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more-
"I got the Weary Blues
And I can't be satisfied.
Got the Weary Blues
And can't be satisfied-
I ain't happy no mo'
And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

(Selected Poems, 33).

Here, Hughes paints the picture of Harlem, the African
American place in Urban America. He sees the cultural scene
from Blues tinted lens. The picture, the music, the flavor
of black life in Jim Crow America is nothing new to him.
Hughes has witnessed and experienced the portrait, the harsh
reality of American life. He sees and feels the Blues
through the piano player. The "syncopated tune" not only
speaks of the Blues but Jazz. Syncopation is not a simply
planned course in music. It incorporates a rhythm
embellishment, an added feature that makes the music vibrant
and full of life. Hughes discovered the same feature in
Harlem. Harlemites had an energy, bursting with life.
Artistic expression was not only a reaction to social and
political problems, but the African American community
celebrated life, its joys and victories. This is Jazz.
This is the Blues. The lone piano player, in a smoke
filled, blue hazy nightclub on Lenox avenue, embodies all
expression Hughes had known and experienced. The piano came
alive with the "ebony hand" that made it Blues, like the
Bluesman. The "sad raggy tune" came from "a blackman's
soul" -- a cultural identity that creates the music. The
weary Blues coming forth from the Bluesman's "ebony" hands
rings of history, pain, celebration, sorrow -- Langston
Hughes' and all black people's history, pain, celebration,
sorrow. The technical Blues music aspect of this poem is
explored by Arnold Rampersad. He notes

And then one night in March, in a little cabaret
in Harlem, he finally wrote himself and his
awkward position accurately into a poem. Letting
his sense of isolation from the culture merge with
his profound love and admiration for it, Hughes
exposed not only his isolation and his love but also
his knowledge that he perhaps could never understand
fully what he so deeply admired. Within a poem based
on loosely conventional form he set the earliest blues
he had known, so that in one and the same work he
honored both the tradition of Europe and the tradition
of black America. The technical virtuosity of the
opening lines is seen only when one measures them
against the cadences of urban black speech, derived
from the South, with its glissandos, arpeggios, and
sudden, unconventional steps. (65)
Thus, it was necessary that the poet was first and foremost the observer -- detached from the African American fabric or group community. It is not a contradiction to be a part or associated with a group and not be integral or intertwined in a community. The factors that detached Hughes were his world view and his desire and initiative to take a journey around the world. Langston Hughes traveled, worked, and lived in Mexico -- And thus being bilingual was an added dimension to the total man -- the African American, American, seeing the world through Blues lens.

In order to objectively photograph, through words, a group, it is necessary to keep that distance, detachment. Subjective analysis is always a factor; however, a more accurate portrait can be painted viewing a subject -- not necessarily being inherent or essentially the subject. Yet, Langston Hughes saw the personification of his experience while observing the piano player. One does not know the musician or what he has experienced; however, as an African American in Harlem, the poet identifies the man through his music. The Blues as an art form carries both personal and non-personal attachments in its creation. Art is the manifestation of feeling, need, and want. Love is its overall passion. Blues, indeed, for Hughes, captures all three. The passion for expression, life, is there. Here, the Blues is "... a way of talking about life; blues is the truth, representing common concerns of everyday people;
blues is a feeling, an emotional dimension shared by the singer and the audience" (Virginia Piedmont Blues, 6). The journey the Bluesman takes in a sense declares an independence. Truth is actuality. The Bluesman, Hughes, is aware of his environment. Each creative effort is an effort to redefine self and other selves through actuality, experience -- truth. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "The Weary Blues" both were written by Hughes as a young adult. In his late teens and early twenties, Langston Hughes absorbed experience and transformed it into expression. Blues expression resulted. All of this was to culminate into a total declaration of "who I am," of self, and of truth. The aesthetics of a cultural reality are often the by-products of experience -- perception, feeling, hearing, sensation. This redefinition relinquishes the baggage of the past. It imparts the message that what I see, I tell. I can only write what I have known and observed. Langston Hughes' honesty and sincerity expose the dignity he reclaims as an African American. His voice is the voice of many who strive for the recognition of identity. He explains "I try to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America" (Emanuel, Preface). By doing so, self is revealed.

When indeed Langston Hughes declared his independence from the past, it was both a physical and psychological declaration. It was time for him to leave the past. He
took the initiative to introduce himself to the world, and
to the new Hughes — the man.

I'd left a box of books in Harlem in the fall,
and before we sailed I went after them. I brought
them aboard ship with me. But when I opened them
up and looked at them that night off Sandy Hook,
they seemed too much like everything I had known
in the past, like the attics and basements in
Cleveland, like the lonely nights in Toluca, like
the dormitory at Columbia, like the furnished room
in Harlem, like too much reading all the time when
I was a kid, like life isn't, as described in
romantic prose; so that night, I took them all out
on deck and threw them overboard. It was like throwing
a million bricks out of my heart — for it wasn't
only the books that I wanted to throw away, but
everything unpleasant and miserable out of my past:
the memory of my father, the poverty and uncertainties
of my mother's life, the stupidities of color --
prejudice, black in a white world, the fear of not
finding a job, the bewilderment of no one to talk to
about things that trouble you, the feeling of always
being controlled by others -- by parents, by employers,
by some outer necessity not your own. All those things
I wanted to throw away. To be free of. To escape from.
I wanted to be a man on my own, control my own life,
and go my own way. I was twenty-one. So I threw the
books in the sea. (97)

In a true sense, the Blues is that throwing away all that
controls you. It is your opportunity to use what you have
in order to control self and to create your own direction.
This is the Blues image. The ship is symbolically freedom;
A way to journey into a better and brighter future.
Movement is the search for definition, truth, and beauty.
Artistic expression through Blues presents the audience with
the rare and often elusive opportunity to know the singer,
the composer, the person. James Cone maintains "The hope of
the blues is grounded in the historical reality of the black
experience. The blues express a belief that one day things
will not be like what they were today. This is why buses, railways, and trains are important images in the blues. Each symbolizes motion and the possibility of changing the present reality of suffering" (139). Even though suffering is emphasized in Blues, too, it is a celebration. Langston Hughes celebrates a new life. He declares "Life is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pull." Life is more than being controlled and defined by others, it is more than the "uncertainties" that he pointed out. The world is his; so, therefore, Hughes takes the opportunity to partake in its fruits. Hughes, as mess boy, boarded the S. S. Malone leaving New York to the West African coast.

Langston Hughes did not escape the question of identity in Africa. He also saw Africa controlled and dominated by white presence. His first glance of Africa projected ambivalent feelings. Contradictions loomed everywhere: "People, black and beautiful as the night. The bare, pointed breasts of women in the market places. The rippling muscles of men loading palm oil and cocoa beans and mahogany on ships from the white man's world, for that was why our ship was there -- to carry away the treasures of Africa. We brought machinery and tools, canned goods, and Hollywood films. We took away riches out of the earth, loaded by human hands" (102). The Blues follows Hughes to Africa. Thus, the poet reaffirms his African heritage with the manifestation of an African American identity -- the Blues.
"In *Deep Blues*, Robert Palmer found that 'Black American music as it was sung and played in the rural South was both a continuation of deep and tenacious African traditions and a creative response to a brutal, desperate situation'" (Tracy 66). He notes that the African American shares a common place with all peoples of color in the world. Racial and/or ethnic oppression is a world wide problem. This world view has allowed the poet to take a comprehensive view of the Blues reality for all oppressed peoples. The treasures of Africa were taken and used to benefit the occident and conquer Africa. However, when Hughes reports on the African scene, he is essentially reporting his heritage, ancestry, culture. He extends self to its ancestral roots on the African continent.

Paul Oliver notes that "African survivals in America are therefore conditional by their appropriateness to life in a strange country and by the degree to which they were permitted or repressed" (10). Steven Tracy cites Alan Lomax's analysis that "Musical performance structure and social structure [that] mirror one another, reinforce one another, and establish that spiritual quality of both African music and African society -- whether in Africa or in African enclaves in the New World" (61). Essentially, Hughes symbolizes that meeting point -- Africa and America -- where the African American produced Blues reflecting cultural heritage; thereby, cultural identity is evident in
the music and literature. This connection is clearly articulated in Hughes lament. Moreover, Tracy notes "because blues and jazz are different, though related, musical forms, it is necessary to look at African music with the blues specifically in mind" (62).

If this analysis seems sparse, fragmented, the poet's writing on Blues and its African connection was just that -- sparse and fragmented. Hughes symbolized the connection here, by living it. Yet, Tracy concludes that "Hughes' knowledge of the connection between African music, work songs and field hollers, and the blues seemed to be general and unsystematic during the early years of his writing, though he was by no means being false or misleading. He was more concerned with the artistic use rather than the scientific examination of his heritage" (74). This did not negate Hughes' love and acknowledgment of the Blues as a cultural identity for the African American experience. Though "That love of surface and rhythms did not spur him to investigate closely the influence of Africa on jazz or blues . . . . Hughes felt that the blues were influenced by the rhythms of Africa, but he never made an explicit statement to that effect. . . . He did not seem to be interested in exploring the African backgrounds of the blues in any systematic, scientific way, primarily because he understood that America was the environment of the blues" (Tracy 69). Thus, we, his audience, become acquainted with Hughes
identity as poet, African American, American. From this point on, Langston Hughes sees Harlem in a much broader sense. Harlem becomes synonymous with Africa, Marcus Garvey, the cultural diaspora, and freedom. Charles Kiel's idea of cultural identity is particularly cogent here. Change is inevitable in every culture. It is a fact of life. No matter how a people survive change, destiny becomes apparent. Keil claims "Individuals come and go; cultures remain. To be sure, cultures change -- sometimes rapidly -- but the process is usually measured, if at all, in generations and centuries" (2).

To understand America, Harlem, and self identity, Hughes must first understand Europe's relationship with Africa. Yes, it is an issue of power, control, dominance. And, yet, it is simple as black and white. Hughes' progressively international perspective on race and cultural identity prevails throughout The Big Sea from this point. Later, we shall see this focus when the poet celebrates the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes details a stirring account:

We paid very little for the labor. We paid but little more for the things we took away. The white man dominates Africa. He takes produce, and lives, very much as he chooses. The yield of earth for Europe and America. The yield of men for Europe's colonial armies. And the Africans are baffled and humble. They listen to the missionaries and bow down before the Lord, but they bow much lower before the traders, who carry whips and guns and are protected by white laws, made in Europe for the black colonies.
At that time, 1923, the name Marcus Garvey was known the length and breadth of the West Coast of Africa. And the Africans did not laugh at Marcus Garvey, as so many people laughed in New York. (102)

Hughes begins to apply the Blues statement through a global view. Travel, at least for young Hughes, opened his mind beyond the borders of North America. Harlem thus became a microcosm of a much wider oppression and desperately needed desire for self identity and redefinition, as all peoples of African descent in the world economy. Charles Keil's statement -- the Blues statement -- rings this truth globally: "Freedom is the issue. Freedom is never given or granted -- it is won" (193). There reflected also Hughes first identity as a "white man." The Africans associated him with the power that abused and oppressed them. Hughes is struck by the irony of the situation: Being African American, in Africa, celebrating the culture of the diaspora. Hughes has always sung the praises of Africa in his poems. Again, Blues is also a celebratory expression for life, living. For example, "Sun Song," is a "song" celebrating the greatness of African heritage.

Sun and softness,
Sun and the beaten hardness of the earth,
Sun and the song of all the sun-stars
Gathered together --
Dark ones of Africa,
I bring you my songs
To sing on the Georgia roads.
(Selected Poems, 5).

Here, the poet connects the diaspora: Georgia and Africa.
He wants to impart his love for Africa and his heritage.
Georgia symbolizes the commonality of all peoples of African descent. This "unifying" strategy dissolves differences which are strategically used to separate and weaken. In Africa the poet tries to juxtapose the African American and the African. He adroitly emphasizes and marks the surprising outcome. Hughes tells them that

blacks in America are very much like yours, I am a Negro, too.

But they only laughed at me and shook their heads and said: "You, white man!" It was the only place in the world where I've ever been called a white man.

One of the Kru men from Liberia... explained to me.

"Here, on the West Coast, there are not many colored people -- people of mixed blood -- and those foreign colored men who are here come mostly as missionaries, to teach us something, since they think we know nothing. Or they come from the West Indies, as clerks and administrators in the colonial governments, to help carry out the white man's laws. So the Africans call them all white men". (102-103)

This was a difficult reality for the young Hughes to accept when he was making the all important inward journey of self identity and exploration. The shocking irony is stinging. Nevertheless, back home in Harlem, Hughes continued the effort to link the diaspora through cultural means and expression. His experiences in Africa proved to be equally shocking in terms of white domination and subjugation of Africa and its peoples. The crew of the S. S. Malone was portrayed as the symbol and epitomy of this dominance and control. These social dynamics, we shall soon observe, takes the form of sexual domination.

Sex has always been a central part of the Blues statement. Sex is essential to Blues definition because it
is one of the most powerful human drives created. Therefore, often sexuality becomes the personification of behavior, love relationships, moral and racial injustice. The sexual element in the Blues is essential in understanding the action of human endeavor or behavior. It is also crucial in understanding racial issues that cloud American thought and attitude. James Cone points out "Most interpreters agree that the dominant and most expressive theme in the blues is sex. Whatever else is said about them, the blues cannot be understood if this important theme is omitted" (128). True to Blues expression, Hughes reported sexual abuse in its most tragic form: rape. Powerlessness to stop the action by the S. S. Malone crew, Hughes, through Blues expressive narrative, resigns as Blues soloist internalizing the observation, which, historically, marked the African woman. Even though every culture has experience sexual abuse, for Hughes, this observation recalls his history, his country's history, his people's history. Essentially, it becomes personal. He is not just a reporter detailing an objective, detached occurrence. When the African girl was repeatedly raped by the crew, Hughes saw his mother, sister, grandmother, and his ancestors abused by a power structure. Feeling powerless without the initiative to voice his outrage, Hughes' Blues becomes even more poignant, with feelings and emotions -- his survival tools to bear life's absurdities. Hughes cites
two occasions where history recalls such moments. While the cargo ship S. S. Malone was anchored along a West African coastal country, the crew was allowed to go ashore for a limited time: "We drank licker and went looking for girls." Hughes explains "The African girls were usually very young, small, with bushy hair, and often henna'd nails. Little boys, their couriers, would take you to them and wait for you outside their doors, or if you stayed all night, they would sleep on a mat beside you on the floor. The small black boys always said the girls were their sisters, but perhaps that was because they knew no other English word to describe them" (107). The Blues here is the lament that the girls were "very young" and their little "brothers" brought men to them.

Hughes' lament is sexual exploitation that has been a major part of his people's history and subjugation. The Blues is found in the very narrative: "The small black boys always said the girls were their sisters." It is not clear if Hughes participated in this romp. Often the Blues soloist does not necessarily experience personally his or her song. The song can be observed. From Hughes narrative strategy, the soloist seems to stand back and report. If, indeed, he participates, it does not take away the Blues factor here. Hughes is aware of his history, and to include this observation in autobiographical narration
must imply identity, who he is or became. Furthermore, the poet’s Blues narrative becomes sharper and keener. The rape scene on the S. S. Malone points out the power of Blues narrative to evoke, perhaps through subtle implication, a history of a people and country. Hughes states

Once we were anchored for more than a week away out in the water, . . . . But one night, very late, two little African girls rowed through the surf in a boat to our vessel, all alone, and stole aboard past the night watchman, hoping to make some money. . .

Firemen, messboys, cooks, the bo’sun, Chips, and oilers poured fourth. . . . The bo’sun, boss-like, grabbed one of the girls and took her off privately to his cabin. Someone threw the other girl down on the floor on a blanket in the middle of the sailors’ quarters and stripped her of her flowered cloth". . .

She lay there naked and held up her hands. The girl said: "Mon-nee! Mon-nee!" . . .

Thirty men crowed around, mostly in their underwear, sat up on bunks to watch, smoked, yelled, and joked, and waited for their turn. Each time a man would rise, the little African girl on the floor would say: ‘Mon-nee! Mon-nee!’ But nobody had a cent, yet they wouldn’t let her get up. Finally, I couldn’t bear to hear her crying: "Mon-nee!" any more, so I went to bed. But the festival went on all night. (108-109)

Thus, African girls reduced to prostitution was Langston Hughes’ lament. The proud heritage — royalty — that was once Africa, noted in his poems, is conquered by traders raping the soil and the women. Hughes, thus is left with the Blues lament that becomes the poet: "Miss Blue’es Child." Note the traditional Blues structure here: three unit structure, second line repeats the first, and a new third line -- all contained in a twelve bar Blues.

If the blues would let me, Lord knows I would smile, If the blues would let me, I would smile, smile, smile.
Instead of that I'm crying' --
You were my moon up in the sky,
At night my wishing star.
I love you, oh, I love you so --
But you have gone so far!

Now my days are lonely,
And night-time drives me wild.
In my heart I'm crying,
I'm just Miss Blues' es child!
(Selected Poems, 113).

As Hughes looks at the world through Blues lens, he cries out for a much joyous view of life. He wants to "smile, smile, smile." Circumstances, events -- life -- won't allow joyful expression. This is the Bluesman's lot. He or she must create joy from within and celebrate self, through a Blues, Jazz, or Spiritual definition. All encompasses both joy and sadness. There must be that balance to reflect the reality of everyday. Loneliness often results from individual efforts at affirming individuality, life. Yet, the passion is in this affirmation of spirit. The Blues drives. It reflects the spirit within. This is the essential nature of Blues definition and statement. It is a creation of the spirit; the truth residing within must speak out. James Cone illustrates

Radical social protest assumes that the victimizers of human beings have a conscience and that the victims have the political leverage to publicize societal wrongs committed against them. But black people had little evidence that white people had a conscience and thus could hear their cries and moans. And they certainly did not possess the needed social and political power to verbalize the injustice of white people against the black community. What were black
people to do when the slightest expression of social resentment could mean death? Without political freedom or the means of achieving it, many blacks turned to the blues for identity and survival. (136)

Langston Hughes thus becomes "Miss Blue'es Child." He creates expressions of self that fosters the Blues. It becomes his only "power" in dealing with circumstances he cannot change. Like Jazz improvisation, Blues, its birth mother, is a response in an attempt to challenge, endure, and survive. The Blues soloist has the power to voice outrage and emotion, than suppress and internalize the pain. The Blues survival tool, like Jazz, is that "different path" taken to aspire toward or reach a desired goal. If Hughes' goal was to show through Blues emotions the powerlessness of a people confronted with injustice whereby laws do not assist or support the victims, he was successful. Blues narrative strategy tend to be comprehensive in showing all dimensions of joy and pain. History, social, economic, political, and psychological dimensions of the Blues dynamic are shown here. James Cone adds "But for black people who live the blues, who experience and share that history with their black fathers and mothers, the blues are examples of Black power and the courage to affirm black being" (137). In a world of color, racial and/or ethnic consciousness, the Blues soloist must sing. Where there is failure in love relationships, whether metaphorically used to show social injustice or a forlorn breakup, the Bluesman has a song.

Langston Hughes' Blues is a song that reflects a
combination of the above. He combines what he has known and what he sees happening and inextricably, the Blues results. Therefore, it, again, must be emphasized, the comprehensive history of Langston Hughes' life experiences. He is truly "Walkin' with the Blues."

Spoken: "Yes, it's me, an' I'm walkin' with the blues again, Every which way I go I'm talkin' with the blues, Man, you know, it's bad when you gotta sleep with the blues, When I go to eat, I eat with the blues; So it musta be the blues in the way that I start. Every time I go to set down to take my rest, The blues is settin' down by the side o' me. I guess I musta been born with the blues, Man, it ain't nothin' but the blues, no which away I go, Blues to sleep, an' blues to sing; Blues to sleep, an' blues to sing; Just right down I must be the man of the blues. This is the blues themself, walkin' with me, This is the blues themself, walkin' with me, talkin' with me, No, go ahead an' make me blue. Yeah, yeah, blue as I can be, Yeah, blues ain't nothin' but me, Blues is carryin' me down gradually by degrees; Each day an' night as I pass by, It's the blues an' me, It's the blues got me; Well, go on then, blues, won't you let me take my rest? Because I'm a worried man, An' I'm a blue man, an' I stay blue all the time. Blues, why don't you leave me be? I don't know why you wants to worry me an' trouble me this away, blues, Blues just won't leave me alone for nothin' I try So that leaves me with the man of the blues." (Oster XV).

The Bluesman's song has no finale. Langston Hughes' Blues is sorrowful yet beauty is intertwined in the narrative:

"Sometimes life is a ripe fruit too delicious for the taste of man..." (117). The world is a beautiful place.

Nature has provided all of the natural landscapes and
sunsets to delight human perception. However, human beings have been given the power of the Will to alter natural settings and life. Hughes is the Bluesman when he lives and observes the reality of human denigration and destruction. Here, Hughes presents the balance of good and evil, beauty and malicious destruction of man and earth. The Blues encompasses the balance. Beauty silhouettes the pillage and horror the Africans are reduced to. Langston Hughes' reprise is the song, the Blues with no finale.

We came to the docks where the great ships from the white man's land rested -- an American boat, a Belgian tramp, an English steamer. . . .

Their men, "say the natives, their white strong men come to take our palm oil and ivory, our ebony and mahogany, to buy our women and bribe our chiefs. . . ."

... Above, the moon was like a gold ripe fruit in heaven, too sweet for the taste of man.

For a long time I could not sleep. (120)

After the African journey, he returned to New York on the S. S. Malone. His second voyage across the Atlantic was on a freighter enroute to Rotterdam. And from Rotterdam, Hughes traveled to Paris by train. The Romance of European travel is his song; the Blues statement still remains. The following passage expresses the balance in Blues: "My ticket and the French visa had taken nearly all my money. I got to the Gare du Nord in Paris early one February morning with only seven dollars in my pockets. I didn't know anybody in Paris. I didn't know anybody in the whole of Europe, except the old Dutch watchman's family in Rotterdam. But I had made up my mind to pass the rest of the winter in Paris"
This is another example where Hughes stands outside of the African American community and is able to objectively report and capture the spirit and mood of a people through poetry. Hughes' Parisian experiences contributed to his Blues on the international level. If he had chosen to restrict himself domestically in the United States, I do not think we would have known the universal poet who saw the Blues from a global or international perspective. This is the key to knowing Hughes -- the man and poet. Identity is reaffirmed through the comprehensive and international perspective Hughes' Blues takes on. Later, we shall see this illustrated clearer as the poet celebrates Harlem. Both cultural identity and his life experiences and observations combine into Hughes' Blues definition. R. Baxter Miller notes "While the speaker narrates the story of his autobiographical self clearly, or of himself as a past traveler plainly, he understands the roles of the figurative dramatist and singer as well" (9). He is the Bluesman weaving the balance between an affirmation of life through Parisian society and the reality of the "figurative" dramatist who confronts challenge and adversity. Langston Hughes is storyteller. We shall see this Blues balance later. In addition, Miller states "To Hughes, autobiography is often literary history, not the mythic pattern through which the narrator creates a mirror image of himself. At times he projects himself into the mask of the dramatist,
writer, and singer, for as artistic creators, at least, they are the same" (10).

Indeed, the author does not separate himself from the titles poet, Bluesman, autobiographer. True to the Blues soloist, Hughes captures the best, the ideal, and juxtaposed it with its opposite. The picture is stated clearly. Hughes' song is one of joy that Parisian society gives him a sense of freedom, and, at the same time, he is quite alone -- away from home. Since Blues is a "migratory" music, the Blues statement here captures the individual trying to find himself, his place in a "foreign" environment. Autobiographical narration here "mirrors" the image of the singer who celebrates the wonder of Paris and the realization that he must confront his "place" even in Paris. However, the definition of place here does not possess the racial edge as it does in America. When Hughes looks for a job in Paris, the Blues balance is complete. A socio-economic dynamic exists rather than a racial one. Hughes asks a group of African American musicians, living in Montmartre, about the possibilities of employment in the city. "'You must be crazy, boy,' one of the men said. 'There ain't no 'any kind of a job' here. There're plenty of French people for ordinary work. 'Less you can play jazz or tap dance, you'd just as well go back home'" (146). Thus, the startling reality of freedom without a means of financial support and the irony of work as an entertainer
reinforces the French stereotype of the happy-go-lucky musically adept "Negro." This contradiction is the Blues experience. The balance is here. However, hope and opportunity aided the poet. He soon found a "cheap" hotel. A Russian dancer, also itinerant, helped Hughes find the hotel and they shared the expenses. Nevertheless, both stayed without work for a considerable time: "Hunger came, too. Bread and cheese once a day couldn't keep hunger away. Selling your clothes, when you didn't have many, couldn't keep hunger away. Going to bed early and sleeping late couldn't keep hunger away. Looking for a job and always being turned down couldn't keep hunger away. Not sleeping alone couldn't keep hunger away" (151). So there we have it. The poet in Paris. In order to live there, he had to offer something. He could not be accorded the same job opportunities as a Parisian. His hunger pains went beyond physical trauma and ache. The Blues in the narrative sees opportunity, beauty, freedom; all of which is remote and detached. Yet, they are all there for the poet.

Hughes and the Russian girl's luck changed, however. Sonya found work as a danseuse (dancer with patrons) at a famous night club named Zelli's, and Hughes became a doorman at the rue Fontaine. Later, Hughes, fortunately, became a "second cook" (dishwasher) at the Grand Duc. George Kent points out "In all autobiographical approaches, Hughes is consistent with what I have called the 'is-ness' of folk
vision and tradition — life is lived from day to day and confronted by plans whose going astray may evoke the face twisted in pain or the mouth open in laughter. The triumph is in holding fast to dreams and maintaining, if only momentarily, the spirit of the self" (57). The initiative that defines Hughes is the spirit behind his endeavors.

His sense of adventure is the energy that propels the poet to places like Europe, Africa, Mexico, etc. This fuel is also the stuff that makes him a survivor. Hughes' Blues is that of survival in the midst of chaos. Perhaps I can also argue that this is his faith in self that sustains hope. Hope survives. He refers to the Blues as this affirmation of spirit that enlivens the spirit, mind, body, and soul. The whole person is consumed. This is the generating power behind the electricity Hughes uses for living. Any further definitions and redefinitions here would only reinforce prior claims. The following passage sums Hughes' "after hours" zest for life in the Grand Duc. This famous night club symbolizes life and vitality when all else is in slumber. It lives on through the magic and vibrant energy of the Blues:

Then when all the other clubs were closed, the best of the musicians and entertainers from various other smart places would often drop into the Grand Duc, and there'd be a jam session until seven or eight in the morning — only in 1924 they had no such name for it. They'd just get together and the music would be on. . . .
Blues in the rue Pigalle. Black and laughing, heart-breaking blues in the Paris dawn, pounding like a pulse beat, moving like the Mississippi!

Lawd, I looked and saw a spider
Goin’ up de wall.
I say, I looked and saw a spider
Goin’ up de wall.
I said where you goin’, Mister Spider?
I’m goin’ to get my ashes hauled!

I did more for my good gal
Than de good Lawd ever alone.
Did more for my good gal
Than de good Lawd ever done.
I bought her some hair --
Cause de Lawd ain’t give her none.

Is you ever seen a
One-eyed woman cry?
I say, is you ever seen a
One-eyed woman cry?
Jack, she can cry so good
Just out of that one old eye!

"Through the mist of smoke and champagne," Langston Hughes recognized a bond, an identity with those musicians who played the Blues: Musicians such as Cricket Smith on trumpet, Louis James on violin, Palmer Jones on piano, Frank Withers on clarinet, Buddy Gilmore on drums (162). Perhaps the Blues enlightened and transformed the child into the man of the Blues.

We have seen where the young Hughes encountered these Blues characteristics through observing family relationships and Africans abused by white traders. Now, the man is on his own -- in Europe -- facing the uncertainties and wonder of the Blues statement. Hughes Blues thus illustrates a pattern, a technical pattern of rhyme and rhythm that is so characteristic of the Blues line and lyric. He noted "The
Blues . . . have a strict rhyme pattern: one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line . . . is slightly changed and sometimes . . . it is omitted . . . and is almost always despondency, but when they are sung people laugh" (Emanuel 138). The irony here is despondency and laughter. Humor is integral to Blues make up. For example, the second Blues line above illustrated this fact: "I did more for my good gal, than de good Lawd ever done. I bought her some hair -- cause de Lawd ain't give her none." Even though people may laugh, the Blues soloist does not. When Hughes details the extent of his hunger in Paris, it is not humorous. Here, of course, Hughes does not use personification or the metaphor to elicit humor. Perhaps this is just another illustration where the balance -- humor, sadness, success, failure -- abounds in the Blues. Hughes cites two more examples of Blues lyrics where humor is not present; however, metaphor and personification are important literary devices that give Blues its code, identity, its power.

"Homesick Blues"
"De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Ever time de train's pass
I wants to go somewhere

"Po' Boy Blues"
"When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I came up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold."
(Emanuel 138-139)

In "Homesick Blues" the soloist uses the personification of the train to denote freedom. Since, indeed, Blues is "migratory" music, movement is essential. Movement is freedom, redefinition. It makes the essential individual statement of who I am. The line "Evertime de train's pass I wants to go somewhere" signifies restriction, bars, and confinement. It is a longing for something that is not easily accessible. Hughes overcame this impediment by traveling outside of the United States. However, as we have seen and shall see, the poet was not without his troubles in a foreign land. Parisian society gave Hughes and the African American musicians who lived there the Blues balance: social and artistic freedom, freedom from racial hostility, but not without economic depression in a foreign country. Hughes noted these factors throughout his European travels.

When Hughes left Paris, enroute to Italy, he was robbed (pick pocket) of his passport and money. Obviously, this led to even more trials and tribulations during his experiences in Europe. So he went to Genoa because he could not return to France without the passport. Again, hunger becomes the common condition of the Bluesman in another country:

But it is pretty hard to starve to death. I got as hungry in Genoa as I've ever been in my life (except
in Madrid, years later, during the Civil War). Sometimes I was so hungry I would stand in front of a bakery window or a store show case and wonder how I could steal something to eat and not get caught and locked up. But I never had the nerve, nor the ultimate necessity of stealing, for something always seemed to turn up just when I was the hungriest, so that I didn't starve to death. In the first place, I was lucky about getting odd jobs in the harbor, and in the second place, I soon discovered and went around with a bunch of resourceful fellows, who had been on the beach in more countries than one, and who knew how to hustle up a few lire almost every day. (192)

As the author noted in his Blues passage: "But I never had the nerve, nor the ultimate necessity of stealing, for something always seemed to turn up just when I was the hungriest, so that I didn't starve to death." The music affirms life and humanity and abandons the idea of hopelessness and failure even where they actually exist.

After arriving in the United States, Hughes immediately met many illustrious Harlemites and the NAACP officers such as Walter White, Mary White Ovington, James Weldon Johnson, Carl Van Vechten, and old friend, Dr. Alain Locke. Hughes' poetry was being published in the "Crisis" and "Survey Graphic" magazines. Hughes' "international" vision is highlighted when he assesses Washington society: "Negro life in Washington is definitely a ghetto life and only in the Negro sections of the city may colored people attend theaters, eat a meal, or drink a coca-cola. Strangely undemocratic doings take place in the shadow of 'the world's greatest democracy'" (206). The Blues balance is implied here. Having the best of a democratic system, yet, America
does not live up to that distinction. Perhaps this Blues balance is analogous to Hughes' experience in Paris earlier. Note again his international perspective. It is also interesting how this perspective gives the poet a multi-dimensional look at segregated Washington and class and color consciousness that exists in the African American community.

In Europe and in Mexico I have lived with white people, worked and eaten and slept with white people, and no one seemed any the worse for it. In New York I have sat beside white people in theaters and movie houses and neither they nor I appeared to suffer. But in Washington I could not see a legitimate stage show, because the theaters would not sell Negroes a ticket. I could not get a cup of coffee on a cold day anywhere within sight of the Capitol, because no "white" restaurant would serve a Negro. I could not see the new motion pictures, because they did not play in Negro houses. (206)

At this point in his life, the poet has a wider context in which to view the race problem in the United States as a result of his travels. In Europe there was no segregation laws as those in Washington, D. C. Even though he suffered from economic hardships, they were not based on race; however, one could argue that in France Hughes were relegated to traditional service jobs for blacks. On the other hand, "... for the 'better class' Washington colored people, as they called themselves, drew rigid class and color lines within the race against Negroes who worked with
their hands, or who were dark in complexion and had no
degrees from colleges . . . . They were on the whole as
unbearable and snobbish a group of people as I have ever
come in contact with anywhere. They . . . seemed to me
altogether lacking in real culture, kindness, or good common
sense" (206). Hughes was not a poet who celebrated false
appearances or those who looked condescendingly down on
others because of class and/or color. Hughes wanted to
capture the real life and vitality of the African American
community. He wanted to feel the bluesy energy exerted by
Harlem. Hughes wanted also to capture the exuberance of
jazz and blues clubs, storefront churches, prostitutes, and
prizefighters (Barkesdale 4). Each is vitally important to
his poetry. In Washington, D. C., Hughes felt this energy
that was to characterize much of his Harlem poems. He
recalls "On Seventh Street in 1924 they played the blues,
ate watermelon, barbecue, and fish sandwiches, shot pool,
told tall tales, looked at the dome of the Capitol and
laughed out loud. I listened to their blues:

Did you ever dream lucky--
Wake up cold in hand?" (208-209)

Thus, the Blues is all here: the irony, humor, and
melancholy. It became his trademark. George Kent notes
"Langston Hughes's literary career began with a commitment
to black folk and cultured sources as important foundations
for his art. The folk forms and cultural responses were
themselves definitions of black life created by Blacks on
the bloody and pine-scented Southern soil and upon the blackboard jungle of urban streets, tenement buildings, storefront churches, and dim-lit bars" (53). Hughes, as the outside observer, records the African American community from this historical perspective: "I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street — gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn’t help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you get on living and you kept on going. Their songs — those of Seventh Street — had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going" (209).

The community’s uniqueness in terms of its history gave birth to what he sees. A history of movement and struggle created the seventh streets he observes. The Blues, Jazz styles of music came from this history. They reflect the strength and energy needed to overcome continued oppression reinforced with vitality — the life blood of existence. Faith and hope are in the music. Hughes becomes enlivened with the fire he observes. He writes "I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street — gay songs, because you couldn’t help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. Their songs — those of Seventh Street — had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going" (209). Here we see the Blues balance clearly illustrated by Hughes. The music is a reflection of the African American community. The music
clearly redefines cultural identity and life style. He, in essence, interprets what he sees through a Blues translation. He does not separate it from the life on Seventh Street. In fact, it is the life on Seventh Street. Kent observes that "Despite the difficulties, Langston Hughes chose to build his vision on the basis of the folk experience as it had occurred in the South and as it appeared modified in the modern industrial city. Judging from his autobiography, The Big Sea, his choice proceeded from the center of his being. He liked black folks. He liked their naturalness, their individual courage, and the variety of qualities that formed part of his own family background" (55). Hughes found truth in the Blues. Blues phrasings and lyrical sentiments echoed the essential nature of individual aspiration and thought. One could not be insincere when singing or composing such heartfelt emotions. Irony, metaphor, personification, joy, sadness, all contribute to the whole of individual being and effort. Hughes sensed this through his observations. He "Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day -- night, day -- night, day -- forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power" (209). Hughes defines the music that redefines his people.
I'm goin' down to de railroad, baby,
Lay ma head on de track.
I'm goin' down to de railroad, babe,
Lay ma head on de track --
But if I see de train a - comin',
I'm gonna jerk it back. (209)

The poet denotes a rich and lasting cultural offering that
tells of history and politics. In addition, Blues here can
be just a creative effort to release artistic talent and
energy. As an art form, the Blues does not necessarily have
to be rebellious, socio-political. It can be looked at
simply as a style of music that continues a musical movement
or genre: purely art or folk song. But as a cultural
expression, Blues should also be interpreted within
cultural, social, and political contexts. Most of all,
these emotions were true, reflecting truth in an individual
and/or group: "I liked the barrel houses of Seventh Street,
the shouting churches, and the songs. They were warm and
kind and didn't care whether you had an overcoat or not"
(209). The Blues, to Hughes, accepts you on an individual
basis. It accepts who or where you are in life. Perhaps
one can argue that the Blues makes a distinction and
perpetuates intraracial animosity (high yellow, brown,
black) but often this is done through metaphor citing a much
larger picture -- be it social and/or political.

Harlem. The name speaks of Jazz, Blues, smoke-filled
clubs featuring a lone saxophone or piano player pouring his
or her heart out through musical keys. It is street lamps,
luring and beautiful women, handsome men, wearing zoot suits with dignity. There were parties given by A'Lelia Walker, James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Carl Van Vechten. Also there were the Jazz swing bands of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Fletcher Henderson. And Harlem was Langston Hughes. Here he paints his "Harlem Night Song."

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.
I love you.
Across
The Harlem roof-tops
Moon is shining.
Night sky is blue.
Stars are great drops
Of golden dew.
Down the street
A band is playing.
I love you.
Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing. (Selected Poems, 61)

Harlem was full of song, Eubie Blake's and Noble Sissle's "Shuffle Along," Florence Mills, Choir director Hall Johnson, comic team of Miller and Lyles, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, Bessie Smith, Rose McClendon, Ethel Waters, Josephine Baker, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and more contributed to the magic that was the Harlem Renaissance. The poem is the song which is Harlem and Langston Hughes: "Trumpet Player." Hughes uses the musician as a metaphor for the poet; both are artists who come out of the same cultural backgrounds and express similar messages.

The Negro
With the trumpet at his lips
Has dark moons of weariness
Beneath his eyes
Where the smoldering memory
Of slave ships
Blazed to the crack of whips
About his thighs.

The Negro
With the trumpet at his lips
Has a head of vibrant hair
Tamed down,
Patent-leathered now
Until it gleams
Like jet --
Were jet a crown.

The music
From the trumpet at his lips
Is honey
Mixed with liquid fire.
The rhythm
From the trumpet at his lips
Is ecstasy
Distilled from old desire --

Desire
That is longing for the moon
Where the moonlight's but a spotlight
In his eyes,
Desire
That is longing for the sea
Where the sea's a bar-glass
Sucker size.

The Negro
With the trumpet at his lips
Whose jacket
Has a fine one-button roll,
Does not know
Upon what riff the music ships
Its hypodemic needle
To his soul --

But softly
As the tune comes from his throat
Trouble
Mellows to a golden note.
(Selected Poems, 115).
Hughes records the lone trumpet player, embodying his history, identity, and the Blues. The Harlem nightclub player rings out his pain, joy in the sound of Jazz and Blues. It is "honey mixed with liquid fire." It is real. It is impressive. It is powerful. The Blues balance is here: "Longing for the moon where the moonlight's but a spotlight in his eyes." Freedom is articulated through the metaphor of the sea: "longing for the sea." His soul sends out its truth for all to hear. Hughes heard this truth. It comes out in this Blues poem. Blues is summed up from the last line. It is comprehensive, full, and whole: "As the tune comes from his throat Trouble Mellows to a golden note." The power of Blues overcomes inhibitions, restrictions, and obstacles. It replaces them with the dignity and strength of self identity.

The Blues is a moan sometimes. It captures the pain in the sound, the music. Kent reinforces that "In Langston Hughes's vision, both in regard to the folk and to himself, the most nearly consistent focus is upon a lifemanship that preserves and celebrates humanity in the face of impossible odds" (56). Yet, in affirming humanity -- black humanity -- identity is captured. If adversity is depressed by cultural means such as music, this is where the badge of distinction resides in a people. This was what the Harlem Renaissance meant to Hughes and all others who gave Harlem its cultural renaissance. Steven Tracy concurs "The essential problem of
the Harlem Renaissance was that of establishing African-American identity, considering both the African and African American heritage. That identity had to be established within the context of the growth of self-awareness within the black community and the various responsibilities -- to self, to the community, and to art -- that those who took part in the Harlem Renaissance felt so acutely" (17).

Because of the comprehensive nature of Blues, Hughes found cultural identity, history, and self. Since his first introduction to the Blues, it has been a part of him, the poet and writer. Langston Hughes and the Blues are one -- cultural identity is reaffirmed and redefined in the music which, essentially, is the life. Hughes recalls this introduction: "I sort of went backwards from an interest in jazz to an interest in the folk roots of jazz. I went backwards from jazz to the blues -- Blues really are the basis of jazz -- and to the spirituals, the great Negro folk songs of the 'saved' periods. And, having tried to write poems in the syncopated rhythms of jazz, I then began to try to write poems in the folk idiom of the blues and the spirituals" (Tracy 107). The African American musical traditions interrelated. Blues speaks of going back to find truth. Jazz, its natural progression, is vital in Blues study. There are improvisational techniques in Blues, especially when the soloist creates the lyric spontaneously. This is Jazz. Harlem is Blues. Harlem is Jazz. Hughes
found both in this magical world that had always existed in the African American community. Through his poems, Langston Hughes enlightened us to this fact. However, we should realize that "As a creative artist, Hughes was much like the blues composer or professional musician in seeking to draw on his folk roots not only out of pride and the need for individual artistic freedom but, sometimes, for economic reasons as well. For these reasons, he did not reject more commercially oriented blues but sought to use the characteristics of those kinds of blues to express one part of the city side of the blues" (Tracy 123).

Langston Hughes truly lived and celebrated life. The life he celebrated was characterized by what he saw and experienced. Blues defined this experience. "Although Hughes wrote frequently about the blues over his entire career, it was not as a professional folklorist or critic but as a casual essayist or commentator, so his discussions of the blues are not comprehensive, systematic explorations of the varied aspects of the blues" (Tracy 114). Nevertheless, Hughes stood objectively by, noting the black experience. His Blues are lyric poetry and autobiographical prose narrative. While working with Wallace Thurman on their publication "Fire", Hughes related directly to the Blues experience:

Once I told him if I could feel as bad as he did all the time, I would surely produce wonderful books. But he said you had to know how to write, as well as how to feel bad. I said I didn’t have
to know how to feel bad, because, every so often, the blues just naturally overtook me, like a blind beggar with an old guitar: You don't know, You don't know my mind- When you see me laughin', I'm laughin' to keep from cryin'. (238)

Early in his life, we saw that he stood apart from the African American community. This was indeed necessary to record accurately and objectively the flavor, mood, and energy the community communicated. Arnold Rampersad notes that "Hughes stood outside because so much of his life had been spent away from consistent, normal involvement with the black masses whose affection and regard he craved" (64). Because of his international edge in his Blues vision, Hughes was able to take that necessary comprehensive view into the black community. As a result, he saw much clearer the United States racial problems as opposed to the economic destitution he experienced in Europe, without regard to race. The Big Sea is an autobiography about freedom: freedom to travel and experience all there is in life without guilt. Hughes loved physically, spiritually, and freed himself to accept that love -- unconditionally. Of course, that special love would extend to the African American community. He refused to accept insincerity and dishonesty. He forte was the positive advancement of humankind. Hughes loved and celebrated the simple man and woman. He immortalized the dishwasher, waiter/waitress, prostitute, pullman porter, and everything that was life
affirming. Perhaps conventional sentiment did not agree with Hughes' vision; nevertheless, he enjoyed life to the fullest. Harlem presented this simplicity that motivated poetry, music, spirit, and soul. In the following poem, "Harlem," we see his pulse that detects truth and mood.

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
or fester like a sore --
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over --
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just stays
like a heavy load.

or does it explode?
CONCLUSION

The African American musical tradition as an affirmation of cultural identity is a social, economic, and political statement. This statement is an act of reclaiming self, identity, and heritage. I have presented the lives of James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes, as they are depicted in their respective autobiographies, enunciating and articulating the musical expressions of Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz. Defined technically and metaphorically in a grandiose, poetic language, guarding the tradition, black scholars and musicians wanted to show that these musical expressions reaffirmed the cultural link that these lives manifested. African American music was born out of the unique experience of American slavery. Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz are acknowledged expressions of freedom. Because of this fact, the African American can claim the music as its creator, reflecting the cultural tie that binds. White Americans can claim this music as an American original and are thereby influenced by it. White Jazz musicians such as Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, and Benny Goodman are examples of those who were influenced by the music. However, whites cannot truly claim the Blues experience, being black in a country that
necessitated Spiritual and Jazz dynamics. Out of the social, political, and economic backgrounds and forces that produced such expressions, the African American created music that aided in survival, self esteem, and advancement. These social factors reinforce the notion that the music was an expression that voiced individual and communal calls for African American inclusion, respect, and justice. The music relays a message to an American scene that denied these human rights based on race. Leroi Jones notes that "The post-slave society had no place for the black American, and if there were to be any area of the society where the Negro might have an integral function, that area would have to be one that he created for himself. The Jim Crow laws were the white South's attempts to limit the new citizens presence and rights in the mainstream of the society, and they were extremely effective" (Blues People, 56). Through Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz, the African American "created for himself" an identity that culturally, socially, and politically defined and affirmed his and her heritage.

Johnson, Hurston and Hughes presented a fictive posture in whose constructed lives paralleled the music. My study revealed that these writers were the singers-soloists, writers-autobiographers who relied on Spirituals, Jazz, and Blues to reaffirm an American and African heritage. To frame the argument, Robert Palmer says "Black American music as it was sung and played in the rural South was both a continuation
of deep and tenacious African traditions and a creative response to brutal, desperate situation" (39). It is this "desperate situation" that linked these authors in their attempts to transcend socio-political and economic obstacles to attain individual goals. Family and community played important roles in their nurture as men and women. From this background, the African American musical tradition was fostered in them.

James Weldon Johnson stated early in Along This Way that his mother, Mary Louise Johnson, a choir director, taught him and his brother J. Rosamond "hymns and other simple pieces." Johnson's mother knew the power of traditional Negro Spirituals. The music had the spiritual fortitude to reinforce strength where it was daily challenged. Johnson says

She belonged to the type of mothers whose love completely surrounds their children and is all-pervading; mothers for whom sacrifice for the child means only an extension of love. Love of this kind often haunts the child in later years. He runs back again and again through all his memories, searching for a lapse or a lack or a falling short in that love so that he might in some degree balance his own innumerable thoughtlessness, his petty and great selfishnesses, his failures to begin to understand or value the thing that was once his like the air he breathed; and the search is vain. (Along This Way, 11)

Thus, Johnson's mother gave her son this love, this music that would be with him "like the air he breathed." Johnson emphasizes the Hymns or Spirituals because he was always able to reflect back to this love: "It was our great delight, my
brother at one end of the keyboard and I at the other, to chime in harmonies" (14). The music remained a part of the man who could rightly claim "I had a home in dat rock."

Moreover, the Spirituals' characteristics of service, honesty, and sobriety -- a love and concern for community -- were reinforced by his father, James Johnson. Johnson recalls "This element in his character was a source of gratification to my pride and also, more than once, to my needs" (Along This Way, 17). It proved to be evident in the politician, activist, and community servant Johnson became.

Johnson's mother was also "rebellious and a non-conformist;" his father -- honest and sincere -- both reflecting community service. Hence, we see the Spiritual voicing the community in service and dedication.

Likewise, Zora Neale Hurston's mother encouraged her daughter to "Jump at de sun." Both Johnson and Hurston's mothers similarly reinforced in their children self confidence and self esteem. We saw how Mary Louise Johnson and James Johnson used Spirituals as music and metaphor to nurture Johnson. Unlike Mary Louise Johnson, Lucy Potts Hurston was not a musician. She did not actually play music in the home but early in life she sang in church. The social dynamics of, for example, Jazz definition applies to Hurston's mother's Will to give her daughter the "tools" to succeed and aspire amid her unique American experience. Jazz was born out of this "Will" to transcend limitations. I maintain that the
African American musical tradition was in her mother's words: "Jump at de Sun." Lucy Potts Hurston wanted her daughter to use those mechanisms that would ensure hope and desire to transcend restriction. As a result, Hurston says "So I was driven inward" (Dust Tracks, 30). She heard the music; it became a vital part of her. The earliest documented record of Hurston acknowledging the music was through a gift by two Northern ladies visiting her classroom. Hurston recalls "The next day I received an Episcopal hymn-book bound in white leather with a golden cross stamped into the front cover. . . . I set about to commit the song words to memory. There was no music written there, just the words. But there was to my consciousness music in between them just the same" (Dust Tracks, 38). It is this "to my consciousness music in between them just the same" that suggests that Hurston acknowledges the music "between" words that "do something for my soul." Her mother's words were the inspiration for Hurston to advance amid oppressive conditions. The music is here "just the same." Hurston reaffirms the music she heard as a child that produced the enthusiastic spirit in the adult: "When I survey the Wondrous Cross" seemed the most beautiful to me, so I committed that to memory first of all. . . . I stuck to the pretty ones where the words marched to a throb I could feel" (Dust Tracks, 38). Hence this is an indication of the secular Jazz and Blues dynamics in the Spiritual. Here the individual is emphasized; however, Hurston, the critic, unlike
Johnson, revised the tradition. Lucy Potts Hurston instilled in young Zora that even though there are constraints and restrictions in which one must live, yet one can "improvise" and create a "different path" in which to effect change and success. Hurston recalls in *Dust Tracks on a Road* that her mother taught "We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground" (13).

Like Johnson’s father, John Hurston’s example led his daughter to "wonder" and "seek and see." The Jazzman often journeys: characterized by traveling to "gigs" or individual improvisation through his "axe" (musical instrument, pen). John Hurston was not a musician and, like his wife, did not play music at home or in the church. Yet, he manifested these Jazz characteristics. John Hurston transcended the limitations of "plantation life" and journeyed to Florida to build a home for his wife and family. Hurston recalls "Plantation life began to irk and bind him. His over-the-creek existence was finished. What else was there for a man like him?" (*Dust Tracks*, 9). This is an individual affirmation of self. Her father, on the other hand, tried to squelch the pride and energy Hurston’s mother tried to instill. We have here the balance that often characterized the Blues statement.

Unlike Johnson, Hurston "fingered the edges" of life in a Jazz-style, jagged journey. Johnson was taught to wear the armor of a Spiritual fortress; Hurston is more "secular." Her
mother and father lived the practical "Blues" of daily life for
the African American. Often, Hurston had to "create" her
pathway to success. She extends the Jazz soloist and becomes
the quintessential Bebop artist. Headon's citation
illustrates the highly critical Hurston. Bop is traditional;
yet, it reclaims Jazz tradition and revises and extends the
text and solo. It is controlled by the individual act of
improvisation. The Jazz musician creates and affirms
individuality within the contraints of melody, harmony, and
structure. Thus, the Jazz artist who grew into womanhood
speaks out. David Headon cites Hurston's comments: "I am not
tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my
soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do
not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that
nature somehow has given them a low down dirty deal and whose
feelings are all hurt about it" (28). True to the music that
is perceived as disjointed, fragmented, but controlled by the
individual art of improvisation, Hurston displayed the Jazz --
a musical movement that continued a musical tradition born out
of oppression and restriction.

Langston Hughes, on the other hand, received a great part
of his strength from his grandmother who taught him the
"uselessness of crying about anything" (The Big Sea, 17).
Hughes' Blues aptly brings together the tradition --
Spirituals and Jazz -- and creates through his poetry the
voices of, for example, James Weldon Johnson and Zora Neale
Hurston. Blues is personal and, yet, communal. Hughes' grandmother's stories gave him the knowledge of the folk while reflecting individual sentiment. Hughes' Blues poems and autobiography present the Blues statement from his family background.

Hughes' parents, unlike Johnson's and Hurston's, were divorced. Therefore, we see the Blues statement in Hughes much more illustrated. They did not play or perform music. Even though he acknowledged the Blues as a boy in Kansas City watching street musicians, his parents illustrated Blues and Jazz dynamics through their daily lives. His mother was itinerant, going from one job to the other which characterized early twentieth-century South to North migration. Disillusioned in the North, the African American roamed to find work. James Hughes was stable, living in Mexico. Hughes encountered the Blues statement, which first established him as loner, individual, when his mother did not approve his trip to Mexico to be with his father. Here, direct Blues definition is served: gender conflict, personal declaration. James Hughes asserted individualism when he forced his son to make the decision to further his education. Hughes' choice to attend Columbia was true to this parental background: personal choices and decisions based on a social context. He wanted to live in Harlem. Unlike Johnson and Hurston, the prominent Blues autobiographical "I" is affirmed. Even though the autobiographical "I" can remain merely observer, it
participates in and captures the picture, the photograph.

Jeff Titon views:

asserted that one need not personally undergo the experience related in a blues song; the singer often can take as his song material occurrences that have befallen others. I have belabored the point that blues singers do not always sing about experiences they themselves have undergone, because the assumption that blues lyrics are factually autobiographical remains common in blues scholarship. Yet, like autobiographies, blues lyrics contain an "I" who is a character, as, actor, a persona created by the singer. (44)

If it appeared that James Weldon Johnson "romanticized" the black community, it is quite appropriate to say that the lyrics to "Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing" celebrate the Spiritual characteristics of forebearance and endurance, describing the folk, their history, their experience. Johnson, thus, portrays himself in honor of serving the folk, reinforcing faith and God consciousness. This is a communal trait emphasized in Spirituals. His observation of the "ring shout" in church reinforces the cultural value Spirituals played in black life. The "romanticizing" of the folk here is Johnson’s way of preserving a tradition that has African roots:

He later described with affectionate care "Ma" White, the leader of the spiritual singing in the congregation, and "Singing" Johnson, a maker of spirituals who traveled from congregation to congregation with a bag full of new songs. Johnson also heard and saw the more primitive "ring shouts" in which religious frenzy and physical exhaustion often followed hours of circular dancing and rhythmic chanting. He stored up these childhood memories and used them later to illustrate the creativity of the black people who produced America’s best known folk music. (Levy 14)
Johnson reveals "for the music was, in fact, an African chant and the shout an African dance (Along This Way, 22). Zora Neale Hurston, on the other hand, endeavored to discover the practical folk; that is, her folklorist ideals sought to capture the community’s music, lore, stories that reveal badges of distinction. Individual, and yet communal, the Jazz metaphor and technical precepts displayed in Hurston emphasize the individual soloist improvising; yet, the community is reflected. Langston Hughes’ detachment from the black community, that is, his reporting and observation of Harlem and the community from an international perspective romanticizes the folk through Blues lyrical poetry and a state of mind. He created out of a Blues mood; what he observed was the Blues. The Big Sea captures the melancholy consciousness of displacement (America, Mexico, divorce, gender conflict) and the lack of power (unemployment, rape, hunger, Africa, Harlem, Europe). The Blues state here, though, affirms the individual’s ability to create a way out: express and voice the folk and affirm cultural identity through the power of music. Hughes, through the autobiography, affirms the community’s solo or individualized efforts to create something out of nothing that continues to say "I am here," "I am a man, a woman," and "We shall prevail." Hughes saw this in Harlem (the lone trumpeter), the Jazz spirit in Hurston prompted her to seek and see, to journey and wander, and the mission Johnson recalls to serve. Indeed, they romanticized
the folk through different lens: a practical Blues, the sacred idealized and yet secular-coded Spiritual, and the practical, individualized use of improvisation Jazz-Bop. All musical traditions were inseparable social dynamics that reflected what it is to be African American. The music speaks with each voice, individual and communal; it journeys with each social and political movement, and ultimately it captures the spirit that culturally identifies the folk and folk heritage.

First, then, what are we to make of Zora Neale Hurston? Concluding thoughts of her would incorporate love, enthusiasm, Jazz, improvisation, Bebop, scholarship, folklore, preservation. She loved the African American community with a zeal that was not only celebratory but critical. She emphasized that "there is no such thing as Race Solidarity in America with any group. It is freely admitted that it does not exist among Negroes. Our interests are too varied. Personal benefits run counter to race lines too often for it to hold" (Dust Tracks, 159). Hurston has always displayed this individual assertive edge when critical in Dust Tracks. The Bop artist, often the loner taking a new unconforming stance, improvises her path through a world that discards or ignores such sentiment. However, like the Jazz tradition created by her ancestors, Hurston is the consummate Jazz artist: compelled to "create" something out of nothing given. Langston Hughes similarly extended the Jazz solo through the Blues; however, he was less critical of the African American. He, more often,
romanticized the folk. Through individual, assertive notions of black identity, the poet in *The Big Sea* criticized the hatred of the African American. Ironically, we saw that his father hated his own people. Hughes' reaction: "And when I thought of my father, I got sicker and sicker, I hated my father" (49). Born out this depression and observation, Hughes' Blues created an autobiography, poetry. James Weldon Johnson reflected an "inner rage" that produced Spirituals encoded in Biblical text. The equanimity that the music engendered in his life allowed him to become the community's voice; he developed frameworks of truth regarding oppressive conditions and the reasons for them. Nevertheless, Johnson refused "spiritual defeat" when confronted with prejudice.

The portrait of himself as artist that Johnson presents in *Along This Way* is a self-consciously wrought one, as controlled as most of his public statements about himself. The reader is always present with Johnson the artist of his people never with the struggling artist for whom disappointments and rage over his critical reception are uppermost. However, in spite of the feeling that Johnson is always putting his best foot forward, the autobiography leaves the reader with a sense of an engaging personality at work on a task that truly matters -- the consolidation of the traditions of a race into an emerging literary tradition". (Fleming 104)

Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes' lives were interwined with the community and yet, as Jazz and Blues would ensure, they had to be detached observers and individual critics of the African American community. James Weldon Johnson led the voice of communal concerns, politically, artistically, and socially.
Alice Walker once said "We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. If they do, it is our duty as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children. If necessary, bone by bone" (xviii). Therefore, Hurston, Hughes, and Johnson leave us with the responsibility as caretakers of their memory, and the memory of all those who have contributed to life and letters. Zora Neale Hurston has left us a model with which to claim and emulate. This is why Hurston became a folklorist and anthropologist. There was a strong need within her to preserve the past -- a past and present that enrich and contribute to continued intellectual and artistic growth. She delighted in affirming cultural identity through the stories and songs of her community in Florida. It was an exciting adventure for her to go into the night spots of a local black community and blend in with the folk. She was ever conscious of her Barnard "patois." She knew that the local community would not be comfortable or cooperative with an "outsider" in the community. In order to do this successfully, she had to incorporate Jazz improvisational strategies that allowed her that opportunity. Likewise, Langston Hughes' Blues strategy -- the state of mind that necessitates Jazz -- immortalized his observations through poetry and autobiography. Since Zora Neale Hurston had to use Jazz improvisation in the field (Folk County, Big Sweet, Lucy, Slim), she had to use the wit, cunning, and wisdom of Jazz to survive. She noted, for
example, "Some little word, look or gesture can move them either to love or to sticking a knife between your ribs. You just have to sense the delicate balance and maintain it" (Dust Tracks, 130).

Langston Hughes, the detached observer, recorded the community. Hurston had to participate in the community in order to survive and retrieve information. Hughes articulated the Blues wherever he saw the black masses placed in that musical genre. Therefore, Hughes Blues strategy asserted the poet, the individual (reflecting community) sense of self amid unfortunate social and political circumstances. The Blues vision operates as a device that distinguishes an individual or group by their actions, thoughts, or forced lifestyles. The Blues is an art form first. However, it articulates passion and fire. It must be expressed. Amiri Baraka said in the foreword to The Big Sea that "It is Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, and others who utilize the rich, tragic, expressive, social and emotional history of the African-American people to fashion an art relevant to the Black masses, but also an art with a depth and feeling that can only be found in the real lives of the people." Langston Hughes, like Hurston, saw this "depth and feeling" found in the African American community. Like those musical artists, Hughes reflected a musical sound in Blues through poetry and autobiography (life experiences narrated). He made the badge of distinction a sincere and honest portrayal of a people
subjected to Jim Crow laws and second class citizenship. Everyone is affected by laws that are used to subject and imperil others. No one escapes the restrictive element of racism. This is perhaps why there was a need for the "Harlem Renaissance." Certainly this was not a black discovery of talent and culture. Whites "downtown" hungered for cultural diversity. Langston Hughes, thus, became the gauge that kept the pulse of the African American community near and dear to his heart. As a result, we are all grateful to him. He allowed us all to celebrate the rich diversity that is America. We know ourselves, our identity, culture, much better. The appreciation is without end. Both Hurston and Hughes displayed similar traits as folklorists -- recording and reporting the community -- yet, true to Blues and Jazz strategies, they made individual affirmations that projected self while reflecting the rich diversity of opinion; thereby, community concerns were voiced through these individual efforts and strategies. Their fiction, poetry, and the autobiographies are individual and communal testimonies. James Weldon Johnson's relationship to the community was similar in terms of voicing communal concerns, but dissimilar in musical strategy. His acknowledgment of Hymns and Spirituals as sustaining forces offers total communal commitment. He directly acknowledges his service to the community -- his life's mission.
James Weldon Johnson was prepared to meet the challenge of service. Johnson's commitment was extended through church and school. His community church and Atlanta University encouraged and taught service. These institutions were not strongly emphasized in Hughes' autobiography for Blues grounding; however, Hurston acknowledged the university experience more. Hence, Blues and Jazz defined technically or used metaphorically were not popular expressions with the religious minded and not encouraged in the black church. Appropriately, James Weldon Johnson's Spiritual nourishment assumed the qualities of service and attendance in the African American community. The spiritual's emphasis is service to God through His agency in humankind. Johnson's acknowledgment of this through the church "I felt myself, like young Samuel the son of Hannah, dedicated to the service of God" (Along This Way, 28) and Atlanta University "I perceived that education for me meant, fundamentally, preparation to meet the tasks and exigencies of life as a Negro, a realization of the peculiar responsibilities due to my own social group, and a comprehension of the application of American democracy to Negro citizens" (66) gave him the strategies to assume positions as attorney, principal, teacher, U.S. Consul, songwriter, and poet. Nevertheless, the artist side of the man remained prominent. Regarding his duties as Executive Secretary for the NAACP, Johnson reaffirms "I got immense satisfaction out of the work of the Association, however, I
struggled constantly not to prevent that part of me which is artist to become entirely submerged" (Wilson, xxi). Johnson's relationship to the African American community, like Hurston and Hughes, was in some ways to record and report (poetry, songs) and in others, unlike Hurston and Hughes, to teach in a controlled formal setting or environment. Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes were teachers; however, they taught from the field, ship, and book. Nevertheless, all three had to be readmitted in the community. Often their work detached them and, thereby they became mere observers; the point here is that Johnson, Hurston and Hughes were always accepted and readmitted into the black community. The music that links and bonds became tools and strategies the authors used for admittance: Hurston, improvising her Barnard patois; Hughes blending the Blues with the folk in Harlem, and Johnson teaching, recording:

In all of my experience there has been no period so brief that has meant so much in my education for life as the three months I spent in the backwoods of Georgia [visiting black families]. . . . I had my first lesson in dealing with men and conditions in the outside world. I underwent my first tryout with social forces. Certainly, the field was limited, the men and conditions, simple, and the results not particularly vital; nevertheless, taken together they constituted the complex world in microcosm. (Along This Way, 119)

Thus, the musicians here sum up what is vital to the African American community: Spirituals that reinforced faith in God and self, and Blues and Jazz that adds energy and creative strategies for survival.
James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes confrontations with racial discrimination were born out of similar experiences. The power of the musical tradition for them became foundations of faith and strength on which to stand. For example, when Johnson and his friend Ricardo were told by a train conductor to move from the first class seats, the conductor's attitude changed when he heard Johnson speaking Spanish. Similarly, in a train station, Hughes wanted to be served a cream soda. The clerk asked him if he was Mexican he'll serve him; however, if Negro, Hughes would not be served. Hughes maintained his identity; as a result, "the clerk turned to wait on someone else. I knew I was home in the U.S.A." (The Big Sea, 51). Therefore both Hughes and Johnson conclude that "in such situations any kind of Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (Along This Way, 65). The equanimity of the Spiritual and the affirmation of self in Blues lamentations here provide this "truth" that both experienced. However, Zora Neale Hurston chose not to include certain of her experiences in Dust Tracks. Her reaction and approach to discrimination were self analytical; she proclaimed "from the depth of my inner heart I appreciated the fact that the world had not been altogether unkind to mama's child" (Dust Tracks, 124). Therefore, Dust Tracks, unlike The Big Sea, and Along This Way, is not a testimonial of racial injustice. Rather, Hurston's autobiography is consistent with images thematically related
in Blues structure. Racial injustice is not explicitly stated or revealed. Hurston noted that "I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color" (Dust Tracks, 151). The Jazz and Bebop are consistent with the singer-writer. Hurston's criticism involves seeking those avenues that project individual creative solutions through Jazz improvisation and Bebop revision. Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson projected Blues consciousness (Identity [Mexican or Negro]) and Spiritual precepts (Forbearance and fortitude). Their reaction to discrimination produced a statement that is consistent with the music: the social and psychological circumstances unique to the African American that produced the musical tradition.

Therefore, the significance of this study to scholars of African American autobiography is to show how the African American musical tradition is encoded and embedded in black life and thought. The unique experience blacks hold historically, socially, and politically in American society fosters the creative and individual outlet necessary for advancement and survival. The "juices" Zora Neale Hurston often refers capture this sense of urgency to reaffirm self identity when at odds with racial discrimination. When viewing black life through literature, all creative dimensions of the black experience should be incorporated to come closer to name, identify, and understand. The broader picture from
this "photographic" study is that of America. African American autobiography, whether Blues or Testimonial, records the African American experience. Scholars should be able to gain a wider perspective through autobiography into the feelings, emotions, and torments blacks face in American society. Thereby, African American fiction and poetry, which too reflect the musical tradition, are comprehended better from a black perspective. I have noted where Dust Tracks, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Mules and Men mirror the other; how Hurston, the consummate Jazz Bebop artist, plays similar "themes" in all three. Johnson's song "Life Ev'ry Voice and Sing" is true to Spirituals, which are reflected in his life. Hughes' Blues poetry is created out of the same Blues mood and consciousness he depicts in himself. The expressions are mimetic -- the art imitates life. This is a necessary "literary" rule for all scholars of African American life and literature.

From this frame of reference, some concluding thoughts are warranted. It is interesting when citing Johnson's accomplishments, both the African American and the wider American communities surface. Johnson, like Hughes, was bilingual and well traveled. Both saw life and domestic problems from an international perspective. As a result, Johnson was a great champion for human rights throughout the world. He became a more effective advocate for his people at home. "He regarded the 'artistic approach' as a means of
advancing the cultural dignity of black Americans in national and international life" (Wilson, xxi). The Spiritual's communal value was inherent in the man. James Cone notes this communal trait: "The black experience in America is a history of servitude and resistance, of survival in the land of death. It is the story of black life in chains and of what that meant for the souls and bodies of black people. This is the experience that created the spirituals, and it must be recognized if we are to render a valid theological interpretation of these black songs" (20). For Johnson, the communal reflection of the Spiritual has an energy base from a global perspective. Perhaps there's a message here: We must look abroad in order to see a clearer picture of home.

In contrast, concluding thoughts are difficult to apply to Zora Neale Hurston. She, like Johnson, had to "seek and see," make journeys outside the borders of Florida. She was not, however, in any sense, conclusive. This is the mark of Jazz, improvisation, Bebop. It lives on. Henry Louis Gates says "Repetition of a form and then inversion of the same through a process of variation is central to jazz" (104). Hence individual creative impulse shines through the improvised solo. The soloist-Hurston inverts order; she revises the established tradition and assumes the position of critic who comments "on the beat." Gates notes this Jazz trait:

Basie, in his composition, creates phrases that overlap the underlying rhythmic and
harmonic structures of the pieces, so that he does not have to play the downbeat, which is the first beat of the twelve-bar chorus. He is, therefore, free to "comment" on the first beat of the chorus. The musical phrase, then, begins before the downbeat of the chorus and ends after the downbeat. Charlie Parker, who revised Basie's "Kansas City style," is a master of this compelling mode of evoking presence by absence through indirection. (123)

It is this "comment" and "indirection" that identifies Hurston. Her life depicted in *Dust Tracks* assumes the critical nature of Bebop and the "inverted" indirection of Jazz strategy. The elusive nature of the music is inherent in the woman. Hurston's work has stood the test of time. Alice Walker comments that "she believed wholeheartedly in the beauty of black expression and traditions and in the psychological wholeness of black life. With little to guide her, except fidelity to her own experience, she documented the survival of love, loyalty, joy, humor, and affirmation, as well as tragedy, in black life" (23). The comprehensive Jazz/Bebop artist is Zora Neale Hurston's identity. It is an African American identity. This trait is affirmed in her work.

Langston Hughes' Blues also journeyed beyond the borders of home. Hughes was the Northern counterpart to Hurston and Johnson's Florida or Southern experience. In all three lives, journey was central. It is central in the African American musical tradition. When I think of Langston Hughes, I see blue-hazed, smoke-filled Harlem night spots where a saxophonist or pianist creates a mellow tune. That tune was
conceived from very real emotions and, more importantly, convictions. It became the secular component of a sacred code of existence. Amiri Baraka concurs "Blues did not begin in slavery, and it is from that 'peculiar institution,' as it was known euphemistically, that blues did find its particular form. And if slavery dictated certain aspects of blues form and content, so did the so-called Emancipation and its subsequent problems dictate the path blues would take" (Blues People, 51). Blues remains true to its form as fiction, socio-economic and political criticism, a channel of emotional outlet and expression, but, nevertheless, an art form; a style of music. The bombast of pretentiousness does not reside in the Blues musician. Real life is there. Experience is there. The American experience is there. Moreover, "so many things are blues—have become part of the blues -- is a language, as an expression, as a consciousness" (Grossman, et. al. 4). The art form, or folk art song, transcends category. Hughes proves this through his poetry and autobiography. Amiri Baraka notes that "the blues is what black people are as music. It is what black life is, too" (Jazz Criticism, 61). Blues here, for Hughes, as he observed, became the channel. Onwachekwa Jemie too states "Hughes’s insistence on a distinct black art utilizing black themes and styles is an affirmation of black existence, a recognition of the fact that Afro-Americans are a distinct people within the American nation, and an insistence on their continued ethnic distinctness"
Harlem, more than anywhere else, gave Hughes the Blues poems that identified a people, a culture, a community whose throbbing energy was converted into song, poetry, story, tale and reflected in the poet.

Jeff Titon sums up this musical approach to autobiographical interpretation. "Art gives us order. But it also gives us disorder — a great deal more than life does, for we put life's preconceptions into preconceived constrictions of reality. The disorder of painful experience, the gap between what we hope for and what happen, can be prolonged and experienced at will only through art. The more we experience it -- connect our pain with other people's pain -- the more we can adjust and adopt, learn and grow" (193). Through the African American musical tradition, we can learn who we are, reaffirm cultural identity, and "adjust and adopt, learn and grow." This is its mighty effect. Contemporary writers and of African American literature and musical expression such as Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man 1952), Albert Murray (Train Whistle Guitar 1974), and Toni Morrison (Jazz 1992) have sought to merge these cultural dynamics in prose narrative and stylistic structures. Spirituals, Blues, Jazz give us our history as a nation, and as African American people. Through this approach, we all can more broadly study America. America has a rich history combined with a tapestry of colors, religions, creeds; once this can be celebrated, truly celebrated, without racial malice or hate, we can be
proud of the identity and cultural identity as American -- and America -- a great nation on earth.
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