

primary employer of blacks; white collar jobs have generally been out of reach; and unemployment has been and is increasingly the black man's fate.

EDUCATION AND THE FAMILY

The Years of Slavery

Although the slave family was not protected in law, adult slaves managed to teach their children the paramount value of family ties and affections. One of the greatest hardships of life under slavery was the knowledge that one's family might be separated. Many a James City County runaway left to see a relative or maintain a kin relationship. In 1774, fourteen year old Judith was thought to be harboured by her "Mother at Mr. Hornsey's Plantation in James City." Virginia-born Sam, who ran away in 1777, was thought to lurk at "Mr. Benjamin Waberton's Quarter, near Morton's Mill, in James City, where he has a Wife." Williamsburg was a favored destination for many local slaves.³⁵

Nowhere is the importance of the family better expressed than in the slave community's efforts to sanction and protect the bonds of marriage. Under slavery, there was, of course, no legal marriage for black couples. However, informal marriage ceremonies did take place. They are invariably described by black informants as important occasions, taken seriously by slaves if not by their masters. Henry Bibb observed that "there are no class of people in the United States who so highly appreciate the legality of marriage as those persons who have been

held and treated as property." One Virginia ex-slave recalled that if two slaves on her plantation wished to get married, they were sent to talk it over with Aunt Sue:

She tell us to think 'bout it hard fo' two days, 'cause marryin' was sacred in de eyes of Jesus. After two days Mose an' I went back an' say we don thought 'bout it an' still want to git married. Den she called all de slaves arter tasks to pray fo' de union dat God was gonna make. Pray we stay together an' have lots of chillun an' none of 'em git sol' way from de parents. Den she lay a broomstick 'cross de sill of de house we gonna live in an' jine our hands together. Fo' we step over it she ask us once mo' if we was sho' we wanted to git married. 'course we said yes. Den she say, 'in de eyes of Jesus step into de Holly land of mat-de-money." When we step 'cross de broomstick, we was married.³⁶

As a matter of fact, upon emancipation most Virginia ex-slave families had two parents, and most older couples had lived together in long-lasting unions. Marriage, while not legal, was an established practice in the Virginia slave community.³⁷

Although slaves do not seem to have been especially concerned about the sexual practices of adolescent blacks, once they

married, members of the slave community were expected to be faithful. Slaves were educated, in other words, to make a vital distinction. Prenuptial pregnancy was perfectly acceptable as long as it was followed by marriage, and from that point onward great emphasis was placed upon settled unions.³⁸

Not all unions were stable, of course, because white masters often broke up families. This must have happened to many James City County slave families in the nineteenth century, when the interstate slave trade grew to unprecedented heights. It is noticeable that the county's black population actually declined by 500 people from 1820 to 1850, even though it was growing rapidly through natural increase. A large number of them must have been shipped south and west to meet the insatiable labor demands of cotton planters. One can glimpse this tragedy through the correspondence of Beverley Tucker who transferred his slaves from Virginia to Missouri before returning to succeed his father as Professor of Law at the College of William and Mary. James Hope, a slave resident in Missouri, asked Tucker to contact his sister, Frances, and inquired about other Virginia relatives.

Your servant James troubles you with this scrap
. . . the grand & principal object is to get
Master to be so kind as to inquire about my
Sister Frances and request my Sister to inform
me her Situation how many children she has
where she is living with her husband . . . and
in fine how she is getting a long in the world

also wither my father is living or dead &
if dead how long since his decease and
wither Dear Hope my cozen she used to
work about town at Taylors is still living
in town and how she is & wither my old god
father Robin Edmonson is still alive.³⁹

Whites also interfered more directly in black affairs and the result was a sizeable mulatto population. As early as 1640, a white man got a female black servant pregnant and was ordered, by the court, to "do public penance for his offence at James City church in the time of divine service." The black woman was whipped. Almost two centuries later, a rather more unusual case surfaced in the County. In 1833, Joseph Gresham wished to have his twelve-year old marriage to Sarah Christian dissolved because she had committed adultery. The adultery was "aggravated," in the husband's eyes, because his wife had committed the act with a "man of color," and had been delivered of a mulatto child. In 1860, the census agents reported over 900 mulattoes for James City County. Over 40 percent of the free blacks and one-fifth of the slaves were the products of sexual unions between whites and blacks.⁴⁰

Parents transmitted some of the central values of slave culture in the simple but significant act of naming a child. Naming children for blood kin was widespread in the slave community. Naming sons for fathers, for instance, was the slaves' way of recognizing a relationship all too often ignored by white masters.

Another common naming practice was to name a newborn child for a dead sibling, based on the belief that the two were one and the same individual. This same belief seems to have been hinted at by Virginia ex-slaves in 1866. "They said," reported a northern white, "that . . . 'when your child dies you know where it is, but when it is sold away, you never know what may happen to him.'" Perhaps the most widespread pattern, however, was to name children for extensive kin like grandparents, uncles and aunts. This represented the slaves' concern to bind together families, to forge links across the generations.⁴¹ Naming children still plays an important role in the black community today.

The Years After Slavery

Once freedom came, blacks could, of course, maintain family ties much more easily than before. Virginia did not require that slave marriages be registered after emancipation; the state merely legalized such marriages. But many ex-slaves re-married anyway. The Virginia house servant Mildren Thomas gave the reason. She had had a slave broomstick wedding, but after emancipation she and her husband paid one dollar to have "a real sho'nuff weddin' wid a preacher." Another way in which ex-slaves demonstrated their concern for family attachments is supplied by a Quaker relief official in Yorktown in 1867. "I have on my list," he reported, "forty-one families of widows and infirm, most of whom have children, either of their own or of some relative or friend to provide for. It is remarkable to witness how much these poor people do for orphan children. We often find

them with one, two, and three helpless children, not their own, but a deceased brother's, sister's, daughter's, sons's, cousin's, and not infrequently a deceased friend's child."⁴²

Black households in the County today still reveal distinct differences from that of their white counterparts. For one thing, they tend to be larger -- by about one person on average. Furthermore, many more black than white households contain relatives other than spouses and children, which is, of course, one reason why they tend to be larger in size. Around one in ten black households contain a relative who is not an immediate kin member; whereas, at best, this is only true for one in thirty of white households (see Table 13).

On a less positive note, black families also exhibit distinctive features that bear the marks of their tragic heritage. Two-parent families, for instance, are much less in evidence in the black, as opposed to the white, community (in 1980, 61 percent of County black families and 90 percent of County white families were two-parent). Female-headed families, on the other hand, are much more numerous in the black, as opposed to the white, community (see Table 14). Comparing marital status between blacks and whites is also revealing. Many more blacks than whites are single, separated, widowed and divorced. Whereas, over 60 percent of white men and women are married, well under a half of black men and women enjoy the same status (see Table 15).

Black families are, of course, much poorer than their white counterparts. The average family income of black families in James City County and Williamsburg in 1980, was about \$16-17,000.

It was at least \$10,000 higher for whites (see Table 16). About one-fifth of the black families in the County in 1980, were classified as below the poverty level; whereas, the proportion for white families was under 5 percent (see Table 17).

The black family, then, certainly did not emerge phoenix-like once slavery was abolished. It was and had been long present. And it retains some of these strengths, which were nurtured under the most inhospitable of conditions, to this day. The caring for extended kin is one good example. Furthermore, the sheer fact that most black residents of the county and town have been born in the state; whereas, this is true for less than half of the white residents, increases the likelihood that blacks will have relatively dense kin and associational ties (see Table 18). And yet, at the same time, the black family has labored, and still labors, under severe handicaps - the pervasive fact of poverty and the legacy of slavery, to name but two.

EDUCATION AND RELIGION

The Years of Slavery

At first, black slaves were denied Christianity because most masters believed it dangerous to put slaves on an equality with whites -- even if the equality went no further than the spiritual sphere. But, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many whites had changed their minds. For one thing, religious instruction was recognized as having certain benefits. Did not Christianity make slaves more content, more hardworking, more

obedient, and more submissive? Many planters believed that this was the case.

There is no doubt that the religious education James City County slaves received stressed these conservative aims. Lunsford Lane recalled how as a child in Virginia, he and the other slaves were "often told by the minister how good God was in bringing us over to this country from dark and benighted Africa, and permitting us to listen to the sound of the gospel." The Right Reverend William Meade, Episcopal Bishop of Virginia, emphasized the theme of obedience in a sermon he delivered to slaves:

Take care that you do not fret, or murmur, or grumble at your condition, for this will not only make your life uneasy, but it will greatly offend Almighty God. Consider that it is not the people that you belong to; it is not the men that have brought you to it; but it is the will of God, who hath by his wise providence made you servants, because, no doubt, he knew that condition would be best for you in this world and help you better towards heaven, if you do your duty in it; so that any discontent at your not being free, or rich, or great as some others, is quarreling with your Heavenly Master, and finding fault with God himself.⁴³

Although obedience and cheerful submission were stressed as the most important commandments, whites also taught blacks a host of others, among them, the sinfulness of stealing, lying, vandalism, harming whites, and suicide. Peter Randolph recalls that the favorite white sermon on the Edloe plantation in Virginia would be summarized in the words: "Servants, obey your masters. Do not steal or lie, for this is very wrong. Such conduct is sinning against the Holy Ghost, and is base ingratitude to your kind masters who feed, clothe, and protect you."⁴⁴

Missionary efforts in Williamsburg were always something of an exception to the prevailing colony-wide indifference. In the late colonial period, in fact, around 1,000 slaves were baptized in Bruton Parish church. Many of these slaves belonged to masters from neighboring James City and York Counties, although many, perhaps most, were city residents.⁴⁵ How much religious training accompanied baptism is, of course, an open question.

Slaves did not simply accept at face value the slaveholders' preaching. They made a distinction between the word of God and the words preached by white masters or their ministers. In the late eighteenth century, many black slaves turned to Christianity for the first time, and particularly to the Baptist faith, in part because this sect was in open conflict with the white establishment. In 1771, a James City County planter registered his unease at his black slaves' religious convictions. He had heard that most of them were "crazy with the New Light and their new jerusalem," a message they derived from white Baptist preachers. Four years later, a mulatto runaway slave named Jemmy could pass

for a freeman in Williamsburg, and be renowned for his "singing hymns and preaching." In 1783, this pattern was repeated by a runaway slave named Tim, last seen in Williamsburg, who "changed his name to James Traveller, passes for a free man, and pretends to be a Baptist preacher."⁴⁶

This mention of Baptist preaching and Williamsburg around the time of the American Revolution is no accident. As is now well known, on the eve of the Revolution, separate black Baptist meetings under the supervision of two free blacks, William Moses and Gowan Pamphlet, were being held in the town. It seems as though this group was constituted as a Black Baptist church in 1781, making it one of the earliest all-black congregations in the United States. Membership in the late eighteenth century climbed to around 500; by 1824, it stood at 700. By this latter date, the church can be positively located at the corner of Nassau and Duke of Gloucester Streets (in 1818, Jesse Cole donated this plot and building to the church). While free blacks figured prominently in the administration of the church, many slaves were members.⁴⁷

By the early nineteenth century, white Baptists had made their accommodation to Virginia's peculiar institution; and slaves in turn made their own judgements. Thus, James Simler recalled of his slave days in Virginia that a "white man--a Baptist used to preach to us. The white people took the communion in the morning, and we took it in the evening. The minister used to tell us not to be disorderly on taking the sacrament--I thought he was disorderly himself, for he kept slaves."⁴⁸

In Williamsburg in the 1830s, the Black Baptist church, now known as the "African Church," was closed for the better part of a year after Nat Turner's rebellion in Southampton County (1831). But it soon opened again, though by the early 1840s, apparently under the supervision and care of white persons. By this time, there was a second Baptist church, a rather flourishing one, called the Zion Church (now Williamsburg Baptist Church, founded in 1828) in existence in the town. It contained black members; in fact, in the late 1830s, well over half the 200 reported members were black. Scervant Jones, a well-known (white) pastor of the Zion Baptist church now also ministered to the African Church. In 1850, the African Church had 298 members and Zion 439 members (168 white, 271 black). Some time in the 1850s, the African church moved into a brick building on Nassau Street. According to Eliza Baker, born a slave in 1845, "the people shouted so loud in the old barn [on the Cole lot] when they got religion that the slave owners was afraid the barn would fall down on our heads, so the slave owners got together and built the brick Church."⁴⁹

For those slaves who knew more of Christianity than the slaveholder told them, the principal tenets consisted of the complementary principles that God intended all men to be free and that, therefore, slavery was wrong. Anthony Burns, who grew up in tidewater Virginia, was convinced that God "had made of one blood all nations of the earth, that there was no divine ordinance requiring one part of the human family to be in bondage to another, and that there was not passage of Holy Writ by virtue

of which Col. Suttle could claim a right of property in him, any more than he could in Col. Suttle." As one ex-slave put it, "to me, God . . . granted temporal freedom, which man without God's consent had stolen away."⁵⁰

Slaves not only believed in their version of Christianity, many also believed in a spirit world which played an active role in the earthly world. William Grimes, a Virginia slave, wrote of his fear of the spirits of several slaves whom he believed to have been poisoned to death in the spinning room of his plantation. Another Chesapeake slave, H. C. Bruce, remembered "cases where . . . conjurors held whole neighborhoods, as it were, in such mortal fear, that they could do unto the Colored people anything they desired, without the least fear of them telling their masters." He also knew an old slave woman who, together with other Virginia slaves, had hired "a great conjurer" to prevent their sale to Alabama.⁵¹

Slaves believed that one could not be truly religious and remain a slaveholder. "White folks can't pray right to de black man's God," asserted Virginia ex-slave Henrietta Percy. "Cain't nobody do it for you. You got to call on God yourself when de spirit tell you to and let God know dat you been washed free from sin." Another ex-slave from Virginia believed that "ole white preachers used to talk wid dey tongues widdout sayin' nothin', but Jesus told us slaves to talk wid our hearts."⁵²

Despite the fact that many slaves who lived on large plantations in the county were forced to attend church services organized and supervised by whites, nearly all such communities

organized their own clandestine congregations. Elizabeth Sparks, who had been a slave in Virginia, recalled that the slaves "used to go way off in quarters and slip and have meetin's. They called it stealin' the meetin'." A common way of absorbing sound was to "turn down" the large pots used for cooking and washing. Sound was very definitely part of these religious meetings. James Smith, who grew up in the quarters of a Virginia plantation, writes: "The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation about half an hour; one would lead off in a recitative style, others joining in the chorus."⁵³

A central figure in the black community was the preacher. We know little of the clandestine preachers who must have ministered to many of the slaves in James City County. We know more about the atypical preachers, those who led the Black Baptist church in Williamsburg from the 1770s through the 1830s. Gowan Pamphlet was the initial driving force and he was still pastor at least until 1807. He was succeeded by such men as Israel Camp, John Alvis, James Wallace, James Robert, Lewis Armstead, Simon Gullet, Benjamin White, and John Dipper. Most of these men were free blacks.⁵⁴

About the last of these men, John Dipper, we know something. He was born a slave in Williamsburg in 1778. On New Year's Eve, 1816, at the age of 38, he was manumitted. He had already been preaching in Williamsburg from at least 1810. In 1818, he purchased the freedom of his wife Edy and twelve years later that of one of his sons. He became a slaveholder himself, and in

1825 was licensed to carry a gun in town. In 1829, he became the minister of the Williamsburg Baptist Church. In 1832, he moved to New Jersey to escape the repression following Nat Turner's Revolt. He died in 1836.⁵⁵

The Years Beyond Slavery

With emancipation, the freedmen could, of course, come out into the open and organize their churches freely. At the first opportunity, 1866, all-black congregations withdrew from white associations and formed their own, thus returning these churches, as was the case with the Williamsburg African Church, to black control. During the war years and immediate post-war years, a number of black Baptist churches were established in both Williamsburg and the County: Shiloh (1864), Chickahominy (1865), New Zion (1870), Gilead (1876), Mount Ararat (1882), and Union (1895). From henceforth the Williamsburg church became known as the First Baptist Church, although it remained on the same site and in the same brick building until 1955, when it moved to Scotland Street. J. M. Dawson was the First Baptist Church's delegate to the Virginia Baptist State Convention from 1873 to 1910.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, it is hard to come by precise statistics about white and black churches in the County. In 1880, however, the census differentiated between the black and white members of the Baptist church. In that year there were two white, and eight black, Baptist churches in the County. Even more striking, black membership stood at almost 3,000 people, which was almost six times the number of the five other denominations combined (i.e.,

162 white Baptist, 100 Episcopal, 155 Methodist, 21 Presbyterian, and 115 Disciples of Christ members).⁵⁷

What we do know, however, is that these black Baptist churches have remained focal centers of black life throughout the twentieth century. Black religion, with its ecstasy, spirit possession, the chanted sermons, the feeling of familiarity with God and the ancient heroes, the communal setting in which songs were created, have long remained a vital, living experience. The spirituals continued to have meaning for twentieth-century blacks. Presumably, lines like "Why doan de debbil let-a me be?" or "What makes ole Satan hate me so?" could have both an other- and a this-worldly message. The importance of the church and its leadership to the black community was nowhere better evident than during the 1950s and 1960s when Reverend Collins, the then minister, took a local lead in the Civil Rights movement that was beginning to sweep the nation. In his case, he applied pressure in a dignified and unostentatious way, by demanding that local white businesses hire more blacks. There have been changes, of course, but religion remains central to black life.⁵⁸

EDUCATION AND BLACK CULTURE

The Years of Slavery

Songs and stories were an essential medium in the slave community. Through them, important values were evoked, supported, and transmitted from generation to generation. In other words, music-making and story-telling served a vital educational purpose. Four eighteenth-century runaway slaves from the James City County/

Williamsburg area had recognized musical abilities: three could play the fiddle and the fourth was "fond of the violin." As early as 1774, one visitor to the Chesapeake learned much from the songs of slaves. In them, he noted, blacks "generally relate the usage they have received from their Masters and Mistresses in a very satirical style and manner."⁵⁹ About a century later, a Virginia ex-slave testified to the inventiveness of black songsters. As Susie Melton and her fellow slaves prepared to leave their Virginia plantation following their emancipation, they created a song for the occasion. She recalled, "Nex' mornin' at daybreak we all started out wid blankets an' clothes an' pots an' pans an' chickens piled on our backs, 'cause Missus said we couldn't take no horses or carts, an' as de sun come up over de trees de niggers all started to singin'"

Sun, you be here an' I'll be gone
 Sun, you be here an' I'll be gone
 Sun, you be here an' I'll be gone
 Bye, bye, don't grieve arter me
 Won't give you my place, no fo' your'n
 Bye, bye, don't grieve arter me
 "Cause you be here an' I'll be gone."⁶⁰

Songs were indeed created by individual black communities. On a hot July Sunday in rural Virginia, one observer sat in a Negro meeting house listening to the preacher deliver his prayer, interrupted now and then by an "O Lord!" or "Amen, Amen" from the congregation:

Minutes passed, long minutes of strange intensity. The mutterings, the ejaculations, grew louder, more dramatic, till suddenly I felt the creative thrill dart through the people like an electric vibration, that same half-audible hum arose, -emotion was gathering atmospherically as clouds together- and then, up from the depths of some "sinner's" remorse and imploring came a pitiful little plea, a real "moan," sobbed in musical cadence. From somewhere in that bowed gathering voice improvised a response: the plea sounded again, louder this time and more impassioned; then other voices joined in the answer, shaping it into a musical phrase; and so, before our ears, as one might say, from this molten metal of music a new song was smithied out, composed then and there by no one in particular and by everyone in general.⁶¹

Slaves then were "educated" enough to composed their own songs.

They were also "educated" enough to teach whites much about music. The Virginia jig, which was popular in the eighteenth century, and which was said to be a dance lacking "any method or

regularity," was, according to one observer, "a practice originally borrowed I am informed from the Negroes." Blacks influenced white dances in another way - by supplying the music. A traveler to Virginia in the late eighteenth century described the accompaniment to a Virginia jig as a "negro tune." Black fiddlers constituted the musicians at most Virginia dances. Blacks contributed to America their own stringed instrument, the banjo.⁶²

Just as in music, so in language, blacks created their own distinctive forms and influenced their white neighbors. The first blacks brought to James City County in any numbers spoke a variety of African languages. This large number of mutually unintelligible languages forced the slaves to find a lingua franca, or language of wider communication. This language, linguists term a pidgin. When native-born children learned a language, it was this pidgin. Once natives begin to speak a pidgin, it becomes a creole, a separate language with largely English vocabulary, but with a syntax that owes much to the original pidgin and to previous African languages. It is this syntax, the way in which the words are assembled, that underlies black English today. One common feature, for instance, is the use of zero copula (omitting the verb to be), as in "you right," instead of "you are right." Another is the absence of masculine or feminine pronouns, as in "ole woman one single frock he hab on." A third is the use of undifferentiated pronouns as in "he pick up he feet and run," "Him lick we," and "what make you leff me?" What needs emphasizing is that these are not just "errors," but rather examples of an alternative grammatical system.⁶³

Whites have undoubtedly been influenced - or we might say educated - by blacks in the realm of language. Most surprising to many perhaps is the fact that some words in the American language today can be traced to the early African languages employed by the slaves. As early as the eighteenth century, visitors to Virginia noted that the inhabitants talked of toting a bag rather than carrying it. This was an Africanism that was incorporated into the language. Other African words which left their mark on the American vocabulary include goober, hoodoo, gumbo, buckra, cooter, pinder, juba, banjo, okra, juke, and perhaps even O.K. Furthermore, the influence on whites extended beyond mere additions to the vocabulary. It encompassed speech patterns. As early as the early nineteenth century, Thomas Ashe's Travels reported an encounter in Kentucky with a German immigrant "who had lived long enough in Virginia to pick up some Negro-English." The Virginia accent undoubtedly owes much to the influence of the black dialect.⁶⁴

The Years Beyond Slavery

The years since emancipation have seen, of course, some assimilation of black language and culture to white patterns, but the process is far from complete and has not been unidirectional. Indeed, some linguists argue that the gap between Black English and Standard English is growing. Approximately 80 percent of the black population of the United States speaks Black English. One black writer has written perceptively of how blacks

have maintained their black vernacular dialect, while at the same time learning Standard English:

In the classroom we all learned past participles, but in the streets and in our homes the Blacks learned to drop s's from plurals and suffixes from past-tense verbs. We were alert to the gap separating the written word from the colloquial. We learned to slide out of one language and into another without being conscious of the effort. At school, in a given situation, we might respond with "That's not unusual." But in the street, meeting the same situation, we easily said, "It be's like that sometimes."⁶⁵

Rather than the wholesale destruction of the traditional dialect, then, freedom has seen most blacks engage in what linguists term bi-dialectism, i.e., the use of different languages or dialects for different purposes.

The same process is also occurring in the field of music. Much black music today is fully in the mainstream of broader American music. Black music has been a major force for assimilation and cultural integration. At the same time, much black music is still distinctive and draws its inspiration from particular experiences within the black community.

CONCLUSION

Education in the black community has followed two paths. During the years of slavery, the path was largely one of resistance to the values whites tried to inculcate and the erection of an alternative value system. Slaves learned to stand together, to suspect whites, to outwit them, to value reading and writing even though it was largely denied them, to acquire craft skills even though most blacks were consigned to field labor, to appreciate the binding power of the family, and to create their own language, religion and folk culture in the face of harsh odds.

Once freedom came, the path has become less clearcut. In one sense there has been a movement into, and assimilation with, the larger society. After all, emancipation brought many more educational, occupational and cultural opportunities for blacks. This inevitably propelled them into greater contact with the broader society. However, underlying all the forces for integration, crucial residues of traditional culture have persisted -- in religion, language, music and much else besides. As blacks have moved toward whites, they have at the same time maintained ties with the older, separate culture. As W.E.B. Du Bois, one of America's most notable black intellectuals, put it, the black person:

ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one body . . . He simply wishes to make

it possible for a man to be both a Negro
and an American, without being cursed,
and spit upon by his fellows, without
having the doors of Opportunity closed
roughly in his face.⁶⁶

Perhaps this day will come soon.