

GENITAL SUPERIORITY IN OAKLAND NEGRO FOLKLORE:  
A THEME<sup>1</sup>

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An exploration of the variability which exists within the genre of Negro humor can only be accomplished with a consideration of the major themes in Negro folklore. One dominant theme which has been delineated is that of genital superiority of the Negro over his so-called white oppressor. As Abrahams pointed out in his paper on the "dozens" in Negro folklore, "both the forms and the culture are of importance," and it is the purpose of this paper to show how the two are interrelated (1962).

There are at least two aspects in this theme which require explanation: (1) content of the assertion in terms of virility striving<sup>2</sup> and (2) why the assertion of dominance in terms of superiority by the Negro over his white oppressor.

Genital superiority can be seen as an expression of virility striving, and virility striving can be explained in terms of the developmental consequences of being socialized in an absent father family. There exists a number of empirical studies which show that males raised in absent father families show tendencies towards cross-sex identification and virility striving can be understood as a compensation for this cross-sex identification (Burton and Whiting 1961). The empirical evidence for absent father families among lower class Negro families is well documented (Frazier 1939; Rainwater 1964; Moynihan 1965).

The motivation to relate to the white in terms of superiority can be understood in part by the self-hate hypothesis of Kardiner and Ovesey in their explorations in the personality of the American Negro (1951). The notion, in an over-simplified form, is to the effect that the Negroes basic identification is with the white oppressor and reality factors prevent achievement of this identification; the resulting frustration causes self-hate that, in turn, feeds back to cause them to strive harder to achieve the goal of "being white" and the cycle is repeated. It is my contention that if the Negro is consistently blocked in attaining his goal of "being white," he will utilize certain escape mechanisms which, while still not allowing attainment of his goal, will allow the Negro to achieve a type of superiority over the white.

One such mechanism is that of folklore, which affords the Negro a device he can utilize to escape his white dominated world of reality for a fantasy world in which he is the dominant individual. This is why a study of Negro folklore themes is important, for it is here we see a reflection of values and special problems which face the Negro. Hence we see Negro folklore as being derived in part from the psycho-social needs of the Negro.

As shown by Kardiner and Ovesey, it is a consistent feature of human personality that it tends to become organized about the main problems of adaptation, and this main problem tends to polarize all other aspects of adaptation toward itself. This central problem of Negro adaptation is oriented toward the

discrimination he suffers and the consequences of this discrimination in regard to his self-esteem. This self-esteem suffers because he is constantly receiving an unpleasant image of himself in relation to the white. But the Negro can escape this impasse merely by retreating to his world of fantasy. A world in which he is not only superior to the white in matters of sexual prowess but also a world in which he can possess the white man's most valuable treasure, his woman (one aspect of the rape complex of the white southerner [Cash 1941]).

The process by which the Negro utilizes this theme of genital superiority will now be analyzed in terms of the previous psychological statements, as follows:

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(1)

This is the luck to the duck  
That swimmer on the lake  
He fucked his grandma  
Through a mistake  
He take the little duck  
Took her to his heart  
Here's grandma fucking fart  
Now, ladies and gentlemen,  
It has come to the test  
To see what nation  
Can fuck the best  
Get back white folks  
Get in your class

The genital superiority stated in this rhyme is evident in that it is a direct challenge to the whites as a nation to pit themselves against the Negro. We can see that the ultimate outcome is decided before the contest begins in that the Negro tells the white to get in his class, which is obviously not equal to the class of the Negro. Other themes are present here but the point of the rhyme is again, which nation can perform the sexual act best.

(2)

There were three travelling salesmen; one was Negro, one was white, and one was, uh, Italian. So, uh, they all, uh, they was going out together riding in 'is car and they came by this farmer's house and the farmer had three daughters. They asked him, "Could we spend the night here?" and the farmer said, "Yes. I have three daughters. I will let either one of you--each one of you sleep with one of my daughters; but the first thing you gotta do is tell me how many times you fuck my daughter, the next morning when you get up."

So, uh, they said, "All right, we'll tell you."

"And the way I want you to tell me--the way that you I want you to tell me is by the way you say good morning to me--I'll know how many times you've got."

So the first morning--the next morning, they all met--that evening they all went to bed with the daughters--the girls; and, uh, early that next morning the white man (he was first) he got up. He spoke, "Good morning" so, uh, he didn't get it but one time. The next morning--the next guy was

the Italian--he got up--"Good morning, this morning." He got it--couple of times. So here come the Negro. He come in there. "Good mornin' this mornin'! How's everything this mornin'? If this mornin' was as good as tomorrow mornin', I'll be back the next mornin'!"

This tale is a variant of a tale which exists in the white oral tradition. Two of the three combatants in the tale are obvious, the third, an Italian, is not so in his relation to the Negro. The informant was asked at a later date as to the distinction between white and Italian and the following answer was given. "He's kind of a Spanish type stud, you know they is pretty good lovers too." The "too" is in reference to the Negro and we can see by this remark that the status of the Negro as a sexual partner is enhanced even more by this comparison. As to the fact that the Italians are "pretty good lovers," it is evident the Negro is far superior by his repetitious "good morning" greeting, with the white a distant third.

## (3)

Yeh, that reminds me--these three guys, uh, they was in court. Uh, this time, uh, one was--they--one white boy, one Negro, and one Italian. The other one--the judge wanted to--they had caught a man and a lady out having an intercourse, and the judge wanted to find out actually what happened--what did the boys see. He wanted to know, you know, for real.

So, that day in court he called the white boy up. The boy say, he--the judge say, "Now, son, you gotta tell me; what did you see?"

He say, uh, "Uh, I saw 'em fucking, judge."

The judge said, "If you don't tell me the truth, I say, I'm gonna fine you ten dollars."

So, well, he said, "Well, judge, I saw them fucking, that's all."

So he told 'em, "Fine him ten dollars!" So he call the Italian guy come up there, and he came up there and he said, "What did you see? Uh, what did you see--John?"

He said, "Uh, just I saw, I saw a man on top of a lady; that was all I saw."

"Fine him! So they called the Negro up there. He--come up there and he said, "Now will tell--I want you to tell me: what did you see?"

The boy said, "Alright. I'm going to tell you just exactly what I saw. Alright judge boy, I saw ten toes up, ten toes down, two asses going round, a big gang going out and in. If they ain't fucking you can fine me ten."

This is an interesting variation to the extent that while witnessing the same sexual act, the Negro is far more articulate in his description of the act. Again reaffirming his genital superiority to the fact he is better able to describe the act, which implies he knows more about what's taking place. I would also like to note that he differentiates between the Italian and the other two actors in the tale. This is done by calling the white and the Negro, "boy" which is a common term of the white southerner when he is addressing a Negro. This could be a way of the Negro getting back at the white or it might be a mechanism of giving the Negro equal status with the white.

Since the Negro does not identify with the Italian as an oppressor, no special term is used to set him off.

(4)

On the fifth of May was a hell-fire day, during the time, you remember the Titanic, you know. They had this Negro on this ship. His name was Shine.

Shine was sitting on the ship, when he told the Captain, say, "Captain, Captain, I go it. The ship got a leak in it."

So the Captain told Shine, said, "I've got sixteen pumps to pump all the water." So Shine went on back and didn't pay no such.

Shine came back and he come running fast, said, "Captain, Captain, the water is above my head!" Shine said he couldn't bail it on time.

Shine jumped off the ship and went round it six times like a motorboat, prrrrrrrrr. So here come the captain. "Shine, Shine, (see it pull) me. I make you the richest man you ever wanna see."

Shine said, "I've been a pull man all along. I still a pull man."

So here come the captain's wife. Say, "Shine, Shine," say "pull me-- I'll give you as much white pussy as pussy you'll ever want to see."

Shine said, "There's pussy on land, there's pussy on sea; dunk your ass and swim like me."

So Shine went on out to sea, while the people on the ship were singing, "Nearer My God to Thee"--them whales on the sea telling Shine, "Bring your big black ass to me."

So Shine went on up north, bought him a hundred women, fucked them all but two. Went up town, got him some oyster stew. He come back and fucked them too.

Shine was so bad; he died and went to hell. The ole Devil busted in the glass. Shine took that big dick and bust him in the ass. So the Devil say he couldn't put up with Shine, so he sent him to Heaven.

Shine got to Heaven, said he's gonna fuck Saint Peter. So he fucked Saint Paul, said he ain't gonna stop until his roll is called.

(5)

Well, there was, uh--during the time the Titanic sunk, there was a colored guy by the name of Shine. That's the way he made his name, because he was the only, uh, colored on the ship at the time. He was the only one that uh,--was the survivor of the ship 'cause he swum that ocean. And this is the ways the story goes:

The 30th of May was a hell-of-a-day  
That's the day when the Titanic sunk.  
The black-assed guy on the name--on that ship  
by the name of Shine.  
Could swim the ocean in two seconds time.  
Shine was sitting up on the deck one day  
He said, "Captain, Captain, don't you know,  
There's water down you deck forty-four feet deep."  
The Captain said, "Shine, go on back and do your act."  
"I got forty-four pumps to keep the water back."

Shine went on. Shine looked at the water, came back up. He said, "I'm gonna tell you one thing. I'm not gonna tell you no more; this ship is sinking."

The Captain looked down; he found it out. The Captain sound the alarm. Ole Shine got on--got on the, uh, deck and said to jump off, to swim.

Shine de--uh--the captain's, uh, daughter was on the deck. She said, "Shine," with her titties all wrapped around her neck. She say, "Shine, Shine," she say, "for me I give you all you ever need."

Shine looked at her. He say, "Yours is good; that I know; but it's better on the other side of the shelf."

Shine came on; he was about to make his last leap off. Some more women grab his; say, "Shine, Shine, if you save for me, I'll give you all you EVER will see."

Shine say, "Your's is good I know, but you got to save your ass and swim like me."

Shine jumped in the water, started swimming. Shine met a shark. Shine looked at the shark. He say, "Your eyes make glit, your teeth make grit; but this one black ass you'll never get."

Shine kept--kept on wailing. Shine looked at the whale. The whale looked at Shine. The whale said, "Nearer my God to Thee, bring you black ass to me."

Shine looked at him; say, "This is one ass you never get," and he swim on to the shore.

[I'd have to come to the end of this; it's too prolonging] and here the informant stopped the tale.

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In this quasi-folk epic of Shine, with versions given by two informants during the same recording session, we see conscious references to the genital superiority of the Negro and also the rejection, on the part of Shine, of the white male and his women.

The first version of this tale, as we can see by the reading, is a more blatant version. The probable reason for this is that the informant relating it is in a higher state of intoxication than the other informant, therefore is somewhat less inhibited by the presence of the recorder.

A close comparison of the two versions will show the basic themes of wish-fulfillment and genital superiority to exist. However, only an analysis of the first version will be attempted, and only as it relates to this paper.

The tale begins with the Negro Shine (the only Negro on board) on the ill-fated ship Titanic (which shows that even the white man's ship is no good). Even though Shine informs the captain of the leak, he will not accept Shine's word as to the extent of the leak (which reaffirms the lack of trust between the white and the Negro).

Shine then leaps from the ship and propels himself (by means of twirling his penis like the propellers of a motorboat, which was indicated by the fact that the informant moved his index finger in a circular motion in the area of his genitals), around the ship six times which again shows that the penis of the Negro is superior to any mechanical phallus the white can build, regardless of size.

Emphasis is placed on this by the fact that the white captain now affirms the superiority of Shine's genitals by the fact that he offers him riches in an attempt to get him to pull the ship. Quite naturally, Shine rejects the offer, again reaffirming his hostility for the fate of the white.

Next we find the white woman offering her supposedly supreme gift, for isn't it true that that's what all Negroes secretly yearn for (a common idea circulated in white culture). But Shine again asserting the Negroes superiority, rejects the offer of copulation with the white female. He states the fact that she is no better than he is, and anyway, Shine says he can get that sort of thing anywhere.

Shine then swims to the North (opposite from the traditional South of the Negro) and copulates with a hundred women while all the whites drown. The supreme act of contempt by the Negro for the white.

In the end Shine dies, and goes to hell, but again he is able to escape the common fate of all Negroes, and like Christ dying on the cross and thereby gaining redemption for all whites, Shine attacks the white devil with his penis, his ultimate weapon, and redeems all Negroes and gains them admission to the white's heaven.

At the conclusion of the tale Shine is asserting his genital superiority over all whites by sexually assaulting all the white's religious heroes.

In closing, it may be stated that in continuing the collecting of Negro folklore, this theme has been consistently observed by the ethnographer. This is especially true of the "ghetto" situation, where individuals have no means, other than overt physical action, but the folkloric encounter to rationalize the oppression of their situation.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup>That this theme also has implications for affecting one-to-one social relationships also should be noted.

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