A rigorous examination of the history of ideas of any substantial segment of American society is an arduous and dangerous undertaking at best. Ideas are not easily perceived phenomena and incontrovertible facts, and they do not organize themselves into a neat series of related events. And in seeking to trace the intellectual history of a people whose chief literary contributions are only transmitted orally and whose tales and music contain hidden meanings, the researcher accepts for himself one of the most difficult tasks available to members of the scholarly community. The problem is further compounded and confounded by the fact that in former years the all-too-infrequent documentation of cultural activities of African and American Blacks was usually provided by observers who were neither members of the societies about which they wrote nor privy to their secrets.

Lawrence W. Levine acquits himself with ease and distinction as he examines the rich world of complex imagery deriving from the folk expression of Afro-Americans: tales, dances, and songs transmitted during the century from the years just before the Civil War to those just prior to World War II. He discovers in this material not only the record of a people who were able to respond to the barbarisms of the dominant society with selectivity, humor, and intelligence, but also evidence which demonstrates that these people were able to preserve a distinct group identity and a traditional culture. In this regard, Professor Levine emphatically demonstrates that the conclusions of social scientists who maintain that “American Negro culture is not something independent of general American culture” or that the Negro “has no [characteristic and distinctive] values and culture to guard and protect” are wrong.

Levine marshals a tremendous quantity of information drawn from a variety of sources into convincing, coherent arguments. His material surveys the slave tales, the religious songs, the jokes, the secular music, the dance, and the popular heroes of black Americans both before and after emancipation. He seeks to understand and then explain these phenomena within the context of hidden meanings prevalent on the plantation, farm, and ghetto. He is able to penetrate the mysteries of the language, the hostilities and the self-consciousness of the defensive minority group, and the deflections of prevalent stereotypes and to present a sensible, documented examination. His treatment of the effects of slavery and freedom upon the various modes of expression of the Afro-American goes a long way toward explaining the process of acculturation which took place during these transitional years.

Those interested in the history of jazz will discover that Levine deals with vital links in the chain connecting African, European, and American musical cultures. In his approach to this matter, Gunther Schuller posited a direct connection between African music and jazz—“every musical element—rhythm, harmony, melody, timbre, and the basic forms of jazz—is essentially African in background and derivation”—and his method was to point out similarities in the two musics. With regard to rhythm Schuller attempted to show that African drumming and jazz drumming are essentially similar; for one of his examples he transcribed the music of an African ensemble and pointed out the presence of American dance rhythms—Samba and Charleston—within it. Levine shows that the connection is not quite so simple, for he approaches the task of explaining Negro music in the United States by acknowledging the importance of a large number of factors: characteristics of the West African musical tradition and their retention in America; the cultural isolation and the social interpenetration of American slaves; the tolerance of white masters for their black slaves’ musical activities [a view con-

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2Ibid., p. 19f.
trasting sharply with the opinions presented by jazz scholars Marshall Stearns and Ernest Borneman but supported in the recent research of Dena J. Epstein\(^3\); the compatibility of European rhythm, harmony, and performance style with African musical elements; and the similarity of Protestant responsorial singing (lining-out of hymns) with African call and response patterns. In his investigation of these areas, Levine draws upon some of the best work in our discipline, and he concludes that “the result was a hybrid with a strong African base.” Because his arguments are cogent, and because his observations about the music itself reveal wide exposure and solid understanding, the jazz historian must now take Levine’s work as a sort of theoretical framework upon which to build a more detailed edifice. And as far as future research is concerned, Levine suggests an area of needed study—detailed investigations of the content, function, and meaning of white religious music in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—that he feels must be accomplished before further comparisons of the religious music of black slaves in America with its counterparts among white Americans of the period will have any validity.

In all fairness it must be noted that Levine does not treat the music under discussion in the same manner that a musical scholar would. There are no transcriptions or analyses. He depends on excellent and substantive studies done by others, such as Waterman, Roth, Merriam, and a host more; his careful documentation and acknowledgment of sources reveals a highly selective reliance upon some of the best scholarly literature available on jazz, blues, slave songs, and African music.

Some of Levine’s subjects are treated in considerably greater depth than they have been before. A good example is his subchapter on “The Ritual of Insult.” Paul Oliver, in his Aspects of the Blues Tradition,\(^4\) presents an admirable introduction to a genre within the larger framework of the blues known as “the dirty dozens,” a ribald verbal contest of wit and insult. He includes texts of several classic dozens with brief interpretations and references to the work of Roger Abrahams and John Dollard. He observes that “the songs have been known for many years and, as only fragments have been noted in early collections, it is probable that the songs have a history that is as long.”\(^5\) Levine carries this work several steps further. He vividly illustrates the ghetto context in which this distinctive protective technique emerges in modern society and carries it back through the earlier black American situation; he probes for an explanation why the generally sacred symbols of mother and father are desecrated; and he then turns to the question of origins and neatly ties the practice to African rituals in which even tribal kings became public targets for direct insult. The exciting combination of allusion, metaphor, and explicit insult characteristic of the American dozens has both an explanation and a history.

It seems to me that the most significant aspect of Levine’s detective work into the heritage and environment of black Americans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is his ability to dismiss as simply ethnocentric the assumption that similarities alone settle the argument of origins. His search is always wide-ranging, and as he works with his material he is careful to identify those tales and song types which were brought directly from Africa, those which were common to both Africa and Europe, those which were learned in the New World through Euro-American influence, and those which were created independently in the New World. What is just as important, he goes on to show that regardless of point of origin, Afro-American culture has its own distinctive

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features of language, delivery, and details of characterization which set it apart. After thoroughly scrutinizing each of the several genres brought up in the book, Levine concludes that

From the first African captives, through the years of slavery, and into the present century black Americans kept alive important strands of African consciousness and verbal art in their humor, songs, dance, speech, tales, games, folk beliefs, and aphorisms. . . . Cultural diffusion between whites and blacks was by no means a one-way street with blacks the invariable beneficiaries. . . . Black relationship to the larger culture was complex and multi-dimensional (p. 444).

Lastly, it should be mentioned that throughout the course of the book, Levine plays the devil's advocate and presents differing points of view. It is satisfying to be able to report that his own arguments are always reasonable, persuasive, and well-documented.

One minor criticism is to be directed not to the author but to the publisher. The footnotes are difficult to use. They are not placed at the foot of the page where they belong, and they are not numbered consecutively throughout a chapter. The numbering breaks back to "1" at each subsection, and the running heads do not give the subheadings, only the chapter titles. A fair amount of time is wasted thumbing backwards through the pages trying to find a footnote citation at the back of the book. Also, the publisher, or editor, was careless in preparing the index. To obtain a proper alphabetical sequence the pages must be read in the order 516, 519, 518, 517, 520.

In spite of these minor flaws, Black Culture and Black Consciousness is an outstanding book, one written by a professional historian who knows how to use sources and interpret data. For those who work in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American studies, Levine's book will serve both as a solid introduction to black American social thought during this period and as an invaluable guide to literature drawn from various disciplines. Lawrence W. Levine is to be congratulated for an outstanding work, a splendid contribution to the intellectual history of Afro-American society.

BRUCE CARR


The special social and intellectual conditions which nourished music in the nineteenth century form a primary focus of Professor Austin's book, and he could hardly have chosen a better mirror in which to study them than the songs of Stephen Foster. Recipient of a genteel but rudimentary literary education, and quite purposely self-taught as a musician, Foster produced during his short life (1826–64) a collection of some two hundred works almost purely reflective of the entertainments, interests, and issues of his day, a body of music essentially untouched by aesthetic or intellectual polemic. Both his life and his songs can enlighten our comprehension of a crucial era of American history, years of sentimentalism, western expansion, and civil war.

But Austin's concern is not simply with Foster's life and works, nor only with nineteenth-century Sitten geschichten; it is with the continuing emergence and influence [Austin uses the word "meanings"] of Foster's songs "from his time to ours." The author's instinct has guided him surely in this field of inquiry as well, for twentieth-century musicians of widely differing sorts still find materials relevant to their own pursuits in Foster's legacy. Composers as unlike as Sir Michael Tippett and Neil Sedaka, for instance, have added more layers of "meaning" to Foster's songs even in the few months since the publication of Austin's study. Thus when it comes time for a revised edition, Austin will probably want to discuss Tippett's new opera The Ice Break, if it is true as John Warrack has written that "Tippett's enduring fascination with negro music takes new form in a passage that briskly absorbs Stephen Foster into his own idiom" [Musical Times 118 (July 1977), 556]. Like Austin's book, Tippett's opera uses music to approach important questions of human history and culture, including the effects of geographic dislocation, oppression, and racial disharmony. [And both illustrate—