

A geography of race in late 19th-c U.S.

- Capital, land, and resources, in U. S. states and territories, are owned primarily by Anglo-Americans
- Recent immigrants and former slaves perform the majority of hard labor.
- Northern cities are largely *segregated* by both class and race
- Mountain villiages and rural communities --> often integrated and relatively disinvested in racial and ethnic difference.



Zora Neale Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934)

- describes the "absence of the concept of privacy" as a phenomenon that influences African American voices
 - **private life:** crowded and communal (both before and after slavery)
 - **public life:** oscillation between being invisible and being intensely scrutinized.
- results in a split identity: rural African-American identity expressed obliquely (irony, circumlocution)



"I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Hegira. I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background. For instance at Barnard...I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, overswept by a creamy sea. I am surged upon and overswept, but through it all, I remain myself. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again. At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. . . . The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race or time, I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads."

—Zora Neale Hurston, *"How It Feels to Be Colored Me"* (1928)

The Blues

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W.C. Handy: "A lean loose-jointed Negro had commenced plunking a guitar beside me while I slept. His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it the sadness of the ages. As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars. The effect was unforgettable."

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W.C. Handy: "His song, too, struck me instantly...*Goin' where the Southern cross' the Dog*...the singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard."

[William Christopher Handy, *Father of the Blues* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 74 -- quoted in Elijah Wald's *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004, p. 8]

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folklorist John Work: "A girl from the town...came to the ten one morning and began to sing about the 'man' who had left her. The song was so strange and poignant that it attracted much attention. "Ma" Rainey became so interested that she...used the song as an encore.

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folklorist John Work: "The song elicited such a response...that it won a special place in her act. Many times she was asked what kind of song it was, and one day she replied, in a moment of inspiration, 'It's the *Blues* -- ' ... " [Ibid. p 11]

[she added that she heard several other singers perform in that way in the course of her travels, but the music had never been called the blues.]

The Blues

- In its earliest **traditional** forms, the “Blues” were not always called the “Blues.”
 - Black musicians throughout the rural south made music as soloists with plucked stringed instruments
 - No single style unifies the broad range of musicians [See Paul Oliver 1969 “Froggy Bottom...” 46-48, 51]
 - General categories like “Piedmont Style” and “Delta Style” are so distant from one another, as to raise questions about the basis for the category “Blues”