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"I seen folks disappeah": An assessment of the meaning and function of the ‘Flying African’ folklore to the Gullah people of Georgia

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Introduction

"Duh ole folks use tuh tell us chillun duh story bout people dat flied off tuh Africa. I blieb um bout flyin."[1]

Emma Monroe's account is one of twenty interviews in Drums and Shadows (D&S) that mention the Flying African folklore. Whilst the story is comparable to a polymorph, as its existence in the oral history of African American communities meant that "it always changes meaning and form", at its crux it involves a newly enslaved African deciding to leave behind the United States and its institution of slavery, and fly back to freedom in Africa.[2]

In the wake of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration, a government sponsored agency that provided jobs to the unemployed.[3] The Federal Writer's Project (FWP) was one of its subprojects, and it was their Savannah Unit which published D&S: an account of oral folklore "survival stories" amongst the Gullah people of Georgia, who were African Americans living in the state's Lowcountry coastal region.[4] The geography of this area meant that after the Federal Constitution banned the African slave trade in 1808, illegal slave ships were able to continue transferring captured Africans into the US.[5] The penultimate illegal slave ship to land in the US, The Wanderer, docked in Jekyll Island, Georgia in 1858.[6] For this reason, the Gullah were considered "a generation closely linked to its native African origin": thus a natural choice for the FWP, given that D&S was an investigation into African cultural survivals.[7]

[1] Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Stories Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1940), 16.
[2] O.S. Storey, 'Flying Words: Contests of Orality and Literacy in the Trope of the Flying Africans', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 5 (2004).
[3] Storey, 'Flying Words'.
[4] *D&S*, 'Intro', xxiii.
[5] *D&S*, 'Intro', xxiii.
[6] *D&S*, 'Intro', xxiii.
[7] *D&S*, 'Intro', xxiii.

The interviews published in D&S became the first written accounts of the Flying African story. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this investigation to trace the story's origins, existing work on this suggests that since the Georgia coast was the site of the Igbo Uprising – where a group of captive Igbos overthrew the slave-ship crew, then committed collective suicide by jumping into the sea - it is inherently linked with the Flying African folklore, explaining why it is so pervasive amongst the state's Gullah communities.[8] However, despite D&S being published in 1940, there has been no single in-depth analysis regarding what it reveals about the meaning of the Flying African story to the Gullah people. This thesis aims to rectify this by assessing the Flying African from the lens of the enslaved and their ancestors, to deduce what the meaning and function of this folklore was to the black historians interviewed in D&S.

Understanding the historiography of slavery more generally can explain why the Flying African has previously been ignored. The traditionalist school, spearheaded by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, "deliberately ignored" black authored sources, instead centring on those from the slaveholders' point of view, which depicted slavery as a positive institution.[9] Due to this, these historians were dismissive of any agency on the part of the enslaved, deeming "negro incapacity" as the reason for all Africans behaving "either as children…or as savages," thus making them naturally inclined to subordination.[10] This skewed approach resulted in the neglect of any social or cultural analysis of enslaved life, meaning that "the masters not only ruled the past in fact; they now rule its written history."[11] More troublingly, this was not limited to scholarship: the warped and racist views of African Americans perpetuated by these historians translated into politics by becoming "part of the edifice of the Jim Crow system" through justifying racial segregation and voting disenfranchisement.[12] However, with the Black Protest Movement of the 1960s onwards and overthrow of Jim Crow came a resurgence of interest in slavery, and thus a revisionist turn in

[8] T. Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 14.
[9] J. Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), xii.
[10] E. Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Random House, 2005), xxii.
[11] G. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1973), xiv.
[12] E. Foner, 'How Radical Change Occurs: An Interview with Historian Eric Foner' (interviewed by Mike Konczal for *The Nation)* (3 Feb., 2015).

historiography.[13] John Blassingame pioneered a move away from sources that focused on the "distorted view" of the white slaveholding class, and instead saw the value in testimony by the enslaved themselves, supporting his claim that they were not simply passive agents who "identified with and submitted totally to his master", but instead that they "held onto many remnants of African culture and gained a sense of worth in the quarters."[14]

However, even revisionist historians have fallen victim to an overly narrow and teleological approach to their analysis of black culture. The existing literature on Flying Africans has an overwhelming tendency to view it as a euphemism for other forms of resistance, such as suicide or escape. One of the most recent seminal works on the Flying African has been Snyder's study into slave suicide and memory, where she situates its legacy within the memory of the Igbo Uprising, using it as an example of how African Americans have reshaped the history of slavery to transform the tragedy of self-destruction into a story of empowerment.[15] Similarly, Katy Ryan goes as far as referring to the Flying African folklore as the "metonymic twin" of enslaved suicide, entirely dismissing any possibility of the genuine act of flight having taken place.[16]

This symbolic approach adheres too closely to Western ideas of rationality, at the expense of dismissing the genuine beliefs held by the African American storytellers. However, one must remember that "ordinary Western common sense is itself a historical phenomenon."[17] Lawrence Levine argues against the reduction of all black culture to mere 'superstition', pointing out that this need to distinguish between the two forgets that "one man's religion is another man's superstition."[18] Timothy Powell highlights that the key distinction between whether the story is regarded as literal or symbolic is "whether the analysis takes into consideration the spiritual dimension of the story, the realm of the ancestors."[19] He shows that the primary epistemological

[13] Library of Congress, 'Limitations of the Slave Narrative Collection' [https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives], accessed 20 May 2020.
[14] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, xii.
[15] Snyder, *Power*, 14.
[16] K. Ryan, 'Revolutionary Suicide in Toni Morrison's Fiction', *African American Review*, 34 (2000), 389.
[17] J.R. Young, 'All God's Children Had Wings: The Flying African in History, Literature, and Lore', *Journal of Africana Religions*, 5 (2017), 52.
[18] L.W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55.
[19] T. Powell, 'Summoning the Ancestors: The Flying Africans' Story and its Enduring Legacy' in P.D. Morgan (ed.), *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 259.

challenge that scholars are faced with in assessing the Flying African story and other folklore is overcoming ideas of reality and rationality that denounce the supernatural and spiritual realm as "figments of the uneducated black imagination."[20] When historians regard stories of the Flying African as symbolic when they were intended to be understood literally, they thus inadvertently perpetuate Eurocentric bias towards the African Americans who share this tale. J.R. Young builds upon Powell's work by contesting these dominant academic values, providing us with a framework by which to analyse the Flying African folklore, through taking a middle ground which still acknowledges the metaphorical interpretation, but also accounts for the "different reality" and cultural ways of knowing that were specific to enslaved Africans and their progeny.[21]

This thesis will offer an original contribution to the existing historiography on the Flying African - which has hitherto focused on its origins in connection with the Igbo suicide, intrinsically lending to a depiction of the folklore as a euphemism - by instead applying Young's cultural relativist approach.[22] It will take into account both the symbolic and literal interpretations they may have had, to thereby extrapolate its meaning and function to the Gullah.

Whilst multiple themes tend to overlap in the story, for the sake of clarity in analysing them individually, this thesis is divided into three distinct chapters. Chapter One will demonstrate the multitude of ways through which the Flying African folklore functioned as a direct, active form of resistance against the slave system, and how this message of resilience carried onto future generations. Chapter Two will illuminate how it enabled the restoration of the black family literally, and in memory. Finally, Chapter Three will examine the role of Africa in the story, illustrating how it reshaped the perception of their homeland, whilst concurrently allowing them to reconnect with their cultural heritage.

It is essential to understand the intergenerational dimension of the folklore when assessing its meaning. Monroe's retelling reveals the different categories of storytellers: first-hand accounts of the "ole folks" who witnessed the flight on the plantation, and the black historians of D&S, many

[20] Powell, 'Summoning', 255.
[21] Young, 'God's Children', 54.
[22] Snyder, *Power*, 162.

of whom were ex-slaves themselves.[23] The third category, however, extends beyond D&S, and is represented by later generations of African Americans who continue to tell the story. Levine argues that African American folklore was not an identical transplantation of African beliefs, but consisted of a "syncretic blend of the old and the new, of the African and the Euro-American".[24] This is definitely the case with the Flying African, as whilst there are stories of transfiguration in African folklore, tales of humans taking flight are relatively unheard of, making them incomparable to the popularity of the Flying African story amongst the Gullah.[25] The blend of beliefs amongst African American communities resulted in "a style which in its totality was uniquely the slaves' own and defined… their world view."[26] With this in mind, the Flying African story thus serves as a wider comment on the purpose of folklore amongst African Americans, as it reflected their perception of the world, in this case specifically exhibiting their efforts to assert their humanity. Whilst this thesis concentrates on the meaning of the story to the enslaved and their progeny extending up to the Gullah interviewed by the FWP in the 1930s, it will ultimately conclude that its message of hope and resistance created a lasting legacy that not only empowered them, but still continues to uplift future generations.

[23] *D&S*, 'Emma Monroe', 16.
[24] Levine, *Black Culture*, 135.
[25] Powell, 'Summoning', 254.
[26] Levine, *Black Culture*, 135.

Methodology

At times, the fieldworkers gave their own descriptions and introductions of the Gullah interviewees, seemingly in an attempt to set the scene and immerse the reader into their world. However, the language employed to describe them serves to make the reader sceptical of their stories. The description of Priscilla McCollough's house as "queer", "bizarre", and "something out of a fairytale" discredits her reliability as a source before she has even spoken, as it "implicitly warns the reader that this oral history cannot be trusted as fact."[27] The opinion of the fieldworkers and editors is disguised as objective fact, inviting prejudice towards McCullough. Their idiosyncratic beliefs are also a reflection of the racist perceptions of black people that were pervasive under Jim Crow, showing the influence of the Southern system on the interviewers.

Through the editing of D&S, the personal racial bias of the fieldworkers implicitly enters the narratives of the black historians themselves. McCullough's story is introduced as having "supposed to have taken place on a plantation," suggesting that her story is not necessarily true by framing it as a myth, rather than an actual event as she intended.[28] In his study of the FWP, Jerrod Hirsch articulates the views of the fieldworkers as seeing their search for remnants of African culture "in the context of an evolutionary theory of culture", which is the idea that "cultural materials from an earlier and inferior stage might survive, but with progress they would disappear."[29] The condescension of Western thought towards black spiritual beliefs is not only evident amongst historians of African folklore as Powell pointed out, but also the fieldworkers who collected the original source material.[30] Although this imposition of the fieldworkers' own judgement as to the accuracy of the stories is subtle, they had no place to be the judge of whether or not these accounts were true.

The narrow scope of D&S also serves as a limitation of the source. Its aim was "to present the customs and belief of what is left of a generation closely linked to native African origin", with

[27] *D&S*, 'Priscilla McCullough', 146; Powell, 'Summoning', 260.
[28] *D&S*, 'Priscilla McCullough', 146.
[29] J. Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 126.
[30] Powell, 'Summoning', 260.

D&S's supervisor Mary Granger noting that it was not an attempt "to give a cross section of the Negro scene as a whole, but only that part of it which would seem to indicate survival elements."[31] Fieldworkers were thus selective, omitting information that was seen as repetitive or not directly furthering this aim: on several occasions, we are told that an interviewee "repeated this story of the Flying Africans", or said they "had also heard about Flying Africans and persons that can disappear", yet any more detail they they may have gone into is excluded.[32] Additionally, the interviewers asked leading questions in their search for cultural retention, hindering their ability to elicit candid responses, and thereby resulting in a "skewed picture of black memories of coastal slavery" due to its heavy emphasis on their superstitious beliefs.[33] These two factors not only limit the sample pool, but also make the existing interviews less reliable in the portrait they paint of the interviewees' beliefs.

The distrust of the black historians towards the white fieldworkers interviewing them poses another methodological issue with D&S, as it may have made them reluctant to disclose the full details of their spiritual beliefs. The fieldworkers themselves observed that the younger generations tended to be "reticent before strangers".[34] Rosanna Williams feared the motivations of her interviewers, asking them "Wut yuh doin? Is yuh gonuh sen me back tuh Liberia?"[35] Julia Grovernor even went to the extent of feigning mental illness in claiming that "I ain know nuttn. Ise feeble-minded," with the fieldworkers soon discerning that "though hostile to outside invasion, [she] was not feeble-minded, but on the contrary sharp-witted."[36] The clash between the different belief systems of the interviewees and fieldworkers again comes into play, as the black historians viewed their stories as "cherished vessels that contained valuable information" so "supreme" that it needed to be shielded from outsiders.[37] By contrast, the interviewers saw it as inferior knowledge that would eventually die out as the Gullah became more integrated into modern American life.

Addressing the FWP more broadly, Paul D. Escott shows the disparities in the answers given by

[31] *D&S*, 'Introduction', xxiii.
[32] *D&S*, 'William Rodgers', 143; *D&S*, 'Florence Postell', 54.
[33] T. Miles, 'Haunted Waters: Stories of Slavery, Coastal Ghosts, and Environmental Consciousness' in P.S. Sutter and P.M. Pressly (ed.), *Coastal Nature, Coastal Culture* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 151.
[34] *D&S*, 'Introduction', 2.
[35] *D&S*, 'Rosanna Williams', 66.
[36] *D&S*, 'Julia Grovernor', 155.
[37] Powell, 'Summoning', 259.

ex-slaves depending on whether the interviewer was white or black. As shown in Table 1, with white interviewers, 73.4% of interviewees displayed a positive attitude (favourable or very favourable) towards their masters, verses 59.5% when talking to a black interviewer.[38] Whilst we do not know exactly who conducted each interview for D&S, we know that the "staffs of the Writers' Projects… were overwhelmingly white", meaning that we must acknowledge the potential unreliability in the answers provided by the black historians.[39]

Table 1. Race of Interviewer and Attitude toward Master

	Percentage	
Attitude toward Master	*White Interviewers (N = 795)*	*Black Interviewers (N = 267)*
Very favorable	9.2	6.7
Favorable	64.2	52.8
Unfavorable	19.6	18.7
Very unfavorable	6.4	20.2
Ambivalent	0.6	1.5

At other times, this hesitance to share was out of fear of the supernatural forces that they were being asked to discuss. Fred Jones implied that the fieldworkers were unaware of the power of the forces they were researching, asking them "Don yuh know…dat yuh might bring trouble on yuhsef?"[40] Some again feigned a lack of knowledge on the topic, with Serina Hall initially denying the existence of conjure and the supernatural, but later going on to admit that "I dohn lak tuh talk bout dem tings."[41] Due to the aforementioned issue of distrust towards the fieldworkers, we cannot know exactly why they did not wish to discuss this. It could be that they genuinely believed that a discussion of the supernatural would attract negative forces. Or perhaps they were simply protecting their valuable knowledge from these intruding whites, and thus wanted to intimidate them in a ploy to dissuade further digging and the potential uncovering of information that should be kept from outsiders. Whatever the reasoning, the resulting interviews should be understood as not being the most complete and accurate reflection of the Gullah communities of Georgia.

Additionally, the speech of the black historians was transliterated by their interviewers based on

[38] P.D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-century Slave Narratives* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 11.
[39] Library of Congress, 'Limitations'.
[40] *D&S*, 'Fred Jones', 24.
[41] *D&S*, 'Serina Hall', 75.

perceived differences in their pronunciation: for instance, “was” is noted as “wuz”, “can” is written as “kin”, and so forth. On one hand, the transcriptions show crucial value to linguists by evidencing the distinctive Creole language developed by coastal black communities.[42] However, Levine contests the value and accuracy of these transcriptions as “people often hear what they expect to hear, what stereotype and predisposition have prepared them to hear”, resulting in records that were not “invariably the language actually spoken by black Americans, but representations of that language recorded by observers and folklorists, the great majority of whom were white”.[43] This thus creates a distorted and patronising view of interviewees, which had a knock on effect of “making it much easier to dismiss the oral histories as lacking philosophical sophistication,” and on a wider scale perpetuating “implicit, if widely shared, notions of the intellectual authority of African Americans”.[44] That being said, following the example of Levine, the original transcription of the FWP has been retained in this thesis, as any attempt at standardising it would only result in further distortion.[45] Given that this study has accounted for the potential bias of the fieldworkers and the impact that this may have had on the interviews, keeping their intended transliteration allows us to remain aware of their bias, and thus remind us to not fall victim to the same overly racialised approach and analysis that they did.

With oral histories, the memory of the interviewees is typically considered to be an issue due to the subjectivity of recollecting the past, leading some to consider the sources less reliable.[46] However, this perceived methodological challenge actually proves to be a strength for the aim of this study in unpacking the meaning of the folklore to its storytellers. Their personal anecdotes to the original story are welcome additions, given that they demonstrate how it was “devised at the moment to explain their own complex position” allowing them to “make them their own and through them revealed much about themselves and their world.”[47] The evolution of the folklore and its differences allow it to encompass other key themes and symbols that will become evident through the interviews analysed in the thesis, which will “indicate a textured oral tradition that took on varying emphases in the voices of multiple tellers to reflect the changing moments and

[42] Powell, ‘Summoning’, 261.
[43] Levine, *Black Culture*, xxix.
[44] Powell, ‘Summoning’, 261; Young, ‘God’s Children’, 59.
[45] Levine, *Black Culture*, xxx.
[46] Library of Congress, ‘Limitations’.
[47] Storey, ‘Flying Words’; Levine, *Black Culture*, 82.

circumstances of slavery."[48]

This thesis has therefore accounted for potential limitations that arise with the use of D&S as a primary source, which by extension also bear relevance to any study of slave narratives in the historiography of slavery. Despite these limitations, the window that D&S does provide into their beliefs is a good starting point for an analysis of their understanding of the Flying African folklore. Whilst it is generally understood that even when using the testimony of the enslaved, it is not possible to fully reconstruct the experience that they had, the documents are essential in "gaining a glimpse of black life during slavery" for studies wishing to understand life on the plantation from their perspective.[49]

[48] Miles, 'Haunted Waters', 152.
[49] S.V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.

Chapter One: Resistance

Early historiography on enslaved resistance by traditionalists projected the slave system as a benevolent means by which to control subordinate Africans. Their focus on white authored sources thus heavily downplayed resistance due to the conventional belief that "negroes…were by racial quality submissive rather than defiant", or denounced it as criminal when acknowledging its existence at all.[50] Writing in 1959, Stanley Elkins advanced the 'Sambo thesis' in arguing that the enslaved became so docile and dependent on their masters, that they lost the capacity to resist.[51] As part of the revisionist upheaval of the mid-20th century, Kenneth Stampp took a "bottom up" approach, looking at the testimony of the enslaved to contest Elkins' argument and prove that they did indeed resist, to such an extent that they earned the nickname "a troublesome property", and thus "created for all slaveholders a problem."[52]

Flying African stories are a testament to this resistance, as they present dissatisfaction with the condition of enslavement, often following a specific altercation with an authority figure on the plantation, as the trigger for flight. This chapter will therefore examine flight as an 'active' form of resistance against their position as slaves. As outlined in the introduction, we can accredit this to the intrinsic roots that the Flying African folklore has in the Igbo Uprising, whereby the slave trader William Mein recalls that they had "suffered much by mismanagement" and thus "rose" against their captors: the black historians of D&S can thus be seen to have interpreted this act of rising as literal, as the subjects of their story take flight in response to maltreatment.[53] This chapter will go further in arguing that through folklore, flight can consequently also be viewed as taking on a greater symbolic purpose. Although in a practical sense it perhaps functioned as a metaphor for other commonplace forms of resistance against the institution of slavery, it went beyond this in allowing them to literally rise above the inferior place in society that the white slaveholding class tried to suppress them into accepting.

[50] U.B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 341.
[51] S. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 28.
[52] K. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 91.
[53] Snyder, *Power*, 162.

Flying African stories often heavily emphasise the ease of flight for those who possessed the ability to perform this form of resistance. In Jack Wilson's recollection, he had an uncle who "could scape an fly back tuh Africa… He could disappeah lak duh win… One time he git cawnuhed by duh putrolmun an he jis walk up to a tree an he say, 'I tink I go intuh dis tree.' Den he disappeah."[54] The mention of his uncle's magical abilities is so casual that it is "akin to popping out for a while on an errand," using language that expresses little shock at his transformation, giving us insight into how normal flight was deemed to be.[55] Wilson's emphasis that his uncle "could disappear like the wind" shows that if one had this intrinsic power, they could choose to activate it whenever they best saw fit. Flight hence granted enslaved Africans with agency that slavery denied them, as this means of resistance permitted them to take full control over their bodies, reinstating their body integrity amidst an institution that aimed to strip them of any and all power. The consequence of this is seen when Wilson's uncle displays no fear upon encountering the patrolman, showing that his power to fly rendered the threat of punishment a non-issue, as he could easily evade it. The significance of him resisting against an individual whose sole purpose was to prevent slave resistance is not lost. To those in enslavement, stories of flight were empowering, showing that it was possible to easily resist against the suppression of the slave system, whilst in turn transferring the power back to themselves.

Oftentimes this form of resistance took on a communal nature, seeing several members of the enslaved community come together to collectively resist against maltreatment on the plantation, and reclaim their power. Priscilla McCullough recalls a story told by her mother, where "All ub a sudden dey git tuhgedduh… Duh obuhseeuh heah duh noise… He run an he ketch duh las one by duh foot jis as he wuz bout tuh fly off."[56] In this tale, there is not only the refusal to comply with slavery, but also the overcoming of the slave system as a whole, as represented by the physical overpowering of the overseer who tried to preclude their flight. The collective nature of resistance is particularly important here, as their joint exit from slavery results in the mutual denial of their labour to the plantation owner, providing a more significant challenge to the overall functioning of the slave system. It also bares greater resemblance to the Igbo Uprising, where approximately

[54] *D&S*, 'Jack Wilson', 6.
[55] A. Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2003), 88.
[56] *D&S*, 'Priscilla McCullough', 146.

ten of the Africans held captive committed suicide by leaping into the water.[57] For McCullough, this story can be understood symbolically as the enslaved following the path of their Igbo forbears in refusing to submit to enslavement, whilst in more practical terms, also inflicting systemic damage to the plantation through their resistance.

In Shad Hall's telling he recalls that "Dey say, 'Massuh, yuh ain gwine lick me,' and wid dat dey runs down tuh duh ribbuh… But fo [the overseer] could git tuh um, dey riz up in duh eah an fly way… right back tuh Africa."[58] Greater meaning is ascribed to the story as it combines the secondary theme of water with the presentation of flight as a form of resistance, which reveals more about its function to the individual. In this case, instead of performing a ritual to prepare for flight, they gather by the river: an act that clearly illustrates the link between Hall's story and the Igbo suicide. As with McCullough's story, the overseer attempts to halt their escape, but the addition of the water takes on greater symbolic meaning. Here, the sea represents the obstacle against return to their homeland, acting as both the metaphorical and literal barrier between the enslaved and their freedom in Africa.[59] Versions of the Flying African folklore that include water thus depict it as essential for their flight and metaphysical transformation, acting as a "liquid launchpad" that permits their resistance.[60] Alongside this, it establishes a greater connection with the story of the Igbos who "took to the Marsh", albeit modifying it to grant a message of empowerment as they rise above the obstruction and return home, making their act of resistance unquestionable.[61]

This chapter has shown how, to the interviewees of D&S, the Flying African story represented a literal form of resistance which was so innate and accessible that it enabled the enslaved to overcome the impediments that were faced with more traditional forms, as flight meant that they were not hindered by overseers or geographical barriers. This, combined with the fact that it served as a partial reinterpretation of the Igbo Uprising, provided the black historians with a tale of resistance that saw their ancestors reclaim their agency. The following chapters will hence explore

[57] C.R. Fee, *American Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales* (California: ABC-Clio, 2016), 381.
[58] *D&S*, 'Shad Hall', 160.
[59] L. McDaniel, 'The Flying Africans: Extent and Strength of the Myth in the Americas', *New West Indian Guide*, 64 (1990), 29.
[60] Miles, 'Haunted Waters', 154.
[61] Snyder, *Power*, 162.

the ways through which this also served to inspire the descendants of the enslaved.

Chapter Two: Family

Traditional historiography's reliance on white authored accounts resulted in a one-sided interpretation of family amongst the enslaved. P.A. Bruce epitomises this, as he denounced the enslaved family as inherently promiscuous, due to the "moral deficiencies" of Africans making "the average [enslaved] mother and father morally obtuse…and at times even unreservedly licentious".[62] Historiography gradually moved away from validating the racism of the slaveholders, however due to the lack of autonomy that the enslaved possessed, they deduced that there was a "failure of any deep and enduring affection to develop", and as a consequence, "in the life of the slave, the family [had] nothing like the social significance that it had in the life of the white man".[63] Blassingame opposed this belief by honing in on the testimony of the enslaved to not only prove that "in the quarters…some form of family life did exist among slaves," but also that it was so significant that it became "one of the most important survival mechanisms for the slave" through providing them with "companionship, love, [and] sympathetic understanding of their sufferings."[64]

This chapter will therefore explore how the Flying African story reclaimed the notion of the black family. It contested the conviction of the slaveholders that amongst the enslaved, "love seems...to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation" through proving its prominence, and enabling the enslaved family to present themselves on their own terms.[65] Slavery furthered the fragmented nature of the black family by taking them away from their relatives in Africa and dragging them across the Atlantic, suppressing the enslaved family through preventing marriage, and splitting those that did form through slave sales.[66] Even when together, their legal status as commodities meant that the threat of separation was imminent.[67] These factors limited the extent to which the enslaved could embrace family, however this chapter will show the role of Flying African folklore in enabling them to resist against this, as the story depicts families joining together on the plantation through the collective act of flight, and upon their return to

[62] P.A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 5.
[63] Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 346.
[64] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 151.
[65] T. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: J. Stockdale, 1785), 231.
[66] H. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1977), 318.
[67] Gutman, *Black Family*, 318.

Africa, reuniting with other family members who had been lost through death or separation.

The role of family in these stories was particularly pertinent due to Georgia's local history. On March 2nd-3rd 1859, The Great Slave Auction took place when Pierce Butler, the biggest slaveholder in Georgia, sold 436 of his slaves to settle his debts.[68] This was the largest sale of slaves in US history.[69] The enslaved referred to this event as the 'Weeping Time', bringing in their own spiritual application in interpreting the heavy rain that fell during the auctions as the heavens crying, reflecting the sadness of the enslaved families that were being torn apart.[70] With this in mind, the Flying African story can be partly recognised as a "corrective measure", acting as a bridge between the past and present to redress the wrongs of history, through enabling the restoration of the black family in memory.[71]

Whilst the collective nature of flying was addressed in the previous chapter, flight can be understood more expressly as a form of resistance that specifically permitted the retention of the enslaved family. Mose Brown describes the flight of "A man an his wife… [who] wuz standin wid some udduh slabes an all uh a sudden dey say, 'We gwine back tuh Africa. So goodie bye, goodie bye.' Den dey flied right out uh sight."[72] The context of how difficult collective resistance was considered to be is essential in comprehending the significance of families escaping together in this story. Frederick Douglass, who escaped from enslavement in Maryland, observed that "thousands would escape from slavery… but for the strong chords of affection that bind them to their families, relatives, and friends."[73] William Wells Brown, who was enslaved in Kentucky, proves the truth behind this in citing the desire to escape as his own reason for avoiding marriage, testifying that "I did not want a wife… I was determined to make another trial to get my liberty… and if I should attempt to bring her with me, the chances would be difficult for success."[74] This reflection on the hindrance that escaping with family members could cause aids us in understanding the function of flight, as it allowed for escape from slavery that was not at the

[68] 'A Great Slave Auction', *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 Mar. 1859, 5.
[69] Snyder, *Power*, 165.
[70] Snyder, *Power*, 165.
[71] Hartman, *Subjection*, 73.
[72] *D&S*, 'Mose Brown', 16.
[73] F. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1845), 91.
[74] W.W. Brown, *The Narrative of William. W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston: The Anti-slavery Office, 1847), 281.

expense of enduring family separation. Accessing this form of supernatural power granted by the ancestors assisted the enslaved in overruling the barriers that slavery imposed on them, without having to sacrifice these bonds, as the individual could not only rejoin their ancestors who remained in Africa, but also rescue their families from plantation life. Alongside this, it disputes the idea of the enslaved family as inherently weak given the lack of control they had, as flight allowed the enslaved to reclaim autonomy over their families.

Many other stories from D&S are almost identical to Brown's, despite the interviewees having no apparent connections to one another, and being from entirely different areas. Carrie Hamilton reflects on a story told to her by her mother, who "say dat…one day wen all duh slabes wuz tuhgedduh, dis man an he wife say, 'We gwine back home, goodie bye, goodie bye,' an jis like a bud they flew out uh sight."[75] The prevalence of this married couple motif across the Gullah communities of Georgia evidences the continual emphasis of marriage and family. This can hence be understood as a direct challenge to the white slaveholding system's perception of marriage amongst the enslaved as illegitimate, due to the fact that as property they could not legally wed, by proving how significant marriage was to them. Emphasising the spousal connection between the subjects of these Flying African stories shows the strength of enslaved marriage, regardless of the lack of respect that slaveholders perceived them with. In Hamilton's narrative and others, the couple unite not only in marriage but also collective flight, giving their slaveholders no choice but to accept their status as man and wife.

Wallace Quarterman brings in more personal anecdotes to the folklore when he talks about "Mr. Blue", who "wuz duh obuhseeuh…he whip um good an dey gits tuhgedduh an stick duh hoe in duh fiel an den say 'quack, quack, quack,' an dey riz up in duh sky an tun hesef intuh buzzuds an fly right back tuh Africa."[76] Quarterman recounted that he belonged to Roswsell King who "die bout sometime in duh fifties," likely meaning Roswell King Jr., who passed away in 1954.[77] Given that King Jr. was the manager of the Butler plantation, it is probable that the "Mr. Blue"

[75] *D&S*, 'Carrie Hamilton', 26.
[76] *D&S*, 'Wallace Quarterman', 143.
[77] *D&S*, 'Wallace Quarterman', 143; M. Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 316.

Quarterman refers to is Alexander Blue, King Jr.'s successor as the Butler estate manager.[78] Blue oversaw the Great Slave Auction, thus it is likely that his name is connected to the Flying African story as slave sales and the act of flight were viewed as equally permanent acts. The overlapping of the two could also be understood as an example of the restorative role of history, as Blue is no longer the authoritative figure who enabled families to be sold apart, but instead a powerless antagonist who tries, and subsequently fails, to prevent the black family from reuniting in Africa.

Interestingly, Quarterman did not work on the Butler plantation at the same time as Blue, so it is not presumptuous to assume that they had never encountered one another. The fact that Quarterman retained details that were not his own evidences how oral history accumulates more individual meanings through alterations that have the potential to become part of the story's fabric, as the inclusion of Blue was likely passed on to Quarterman by those who had encountered him first-hand. This allows us to see the meaning the story took on to Quarterman, as well as the storytellers that came before him. Richard Dorson, however, warns against the blurred lines between lore and fact, alleging that the personal narratives of African Americans can "prove to be folklore in disguise".[79] Nonetheless, when assessing the meaning of this story to Quarterman, the level of truth and accuracy to his version of events is irrelevant, as it only matters what he believed. Bringing Blue into the story makes it more specific to him and his ancestors, reimagining the tragedy of sale by instead interpreting it as flying back to their homeland, allowing their tragic past to take on a newfound message of empowerment.

The Flying African story also encourages us to expand what we encompass under the term 'family', as within the slave community, its definition was not as straightforward. Sidney Mintz argues that the development of social bonds between African Americans began as early as on slave ships during the Middle Passage, when the captives united through their shared trauma of being stolen from Africa.[80] This connection continued on the plantation and with later generations of the enslaved, as the conditions of slavery that perpetuated forced separation resulted in the formation

[78] Bell, *Major Butler*, 316.
[79] R.M. Dorson, *American Negro Folktales* (Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1956), 282.
[80] S.W. Mintz, R. Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 42.

of "surrogate" family members "who were not blood kin."[81] Gutman suggests that they should be referred to as "quasi-kin", the formation of which played a significant role in the development of slave communities through "binding unrelated adults to one another."[82] This is especially remarkable when noting that these bonds thrived in spite of attempts by slaveholders to not only exert control, but also strip them of having a sense of identity and belonging. Whilst Southern slavery resulted in a lack of autonomy over the enslaved family, it hereby also blurred the lines between non-relatives and those connected by blood. Therefore, even when the familial connection is not explicitly stated, the Flying African story still attests to the tenacity of these bonds, which is shown when they join together in flight to collectively reunite with their other family members who remain in Africa. The shared nature of this folklore further exhibits this, as the storyteller often emphasises their direct familial relation with the subject who took flight, and remarks that "Ebrybody know bout um".[83] Whilst this serves to connect them to the Flying African, it also means that the later generations become connected with one another. The actions of their ancestors hence allow them to embrace a common past.

This is not to say that the Flying African story solely restored the black family, as sometimes it simultaneously broke them apart. Rosa Grant recalls the flight of her great-grandmother Ryna, as told from the perspective of her grandmother Theresa, who was just a child at the time. Theresa told Rosa that "ttuh dey bin yuh a wile, duh Mothuh git to weah she caahn stan it an she wannuh go back tuh Africa…She stretch uh ahms out--so--an rise right up an fly right back tuh Africa. Muh gran say she wuz standin right deah wen it happen. She alluz wish dat uh mothuh had teach uh how tuh fly."[84] This story is markedly different from the others, as not only was Ryna's flight an individual affair, but we learn of the suffering of her daughter in the aftermath, as she was left behind. In this case, perhaps the story of flight serves as a euphemism to justify Ryna's reason for deserting her daughter in her own attempt to leave enslavement, be it through flight, escape, or death. Flight, however, makes her abandonment of Theresa seem more justified, as means she did not forsake her child for selfish reasons, but so that she could rejoin other lost relatives who remained in Africa. Additionally, framing this abandonment in the context of the supernatural and

[81] Rawick, *From Sundown*, 201.
[82] Gutman, *Black Family*, 220.
[83] *D&S*, 'Wallace Quarterman', 143.
[84] *D&S*, 'Rosa Grant', 137.

metaphysical provides a sense of comfort in making the act of flight accessible to those left behind. It gives the impression that the family member who ‘flew away’ is not gone forever: if only the remaining family members are one day able to attain the same higher power possessed by Ryna and others, then they too can join those who left them, away from the harsh environment of the plantation, and instead in the sanctuary of their African homeland. This sense of hope thus paradoxically allows for the concurrent breaking and restoration of the black family.

This chapter has shown that the Flying African story reveals the importance of family to the enslaved and their progeny. The story in itself affirmed the cohesiveness of the enslaved family, despite its existence within an institution that was determined to tear it apart. It thus allowed for the amelioration of the pain of separation, regardless of whether it occurred due to the decision of the enslaved person or the slaveholder, whilst also challenging the beliefs of the white slaveholding class, specifically their dismissal of the capacity of black people to form meaningful relationships. Moreover, the story of the Flying African directly allowed for the restoration of the black family, through the act of flight, reunion in Africa, and in the memory of the descendants who take on the role of storytellers in D&S, who will pass on this message to generations to come.

Chapter Three: Africa

Traditionalist historians have underestimated the extent to which Africanisms were retained amongst those brought across to the United States, and this can again be traced back to their neglect of black authored sources. Due to a heavy reliance on white archival sources, Robert E. Park and others held the belief "that when [the Negro] landed in the United States, [he] left behind him almost everything but his dark complexion and his tropical temperament."[85] Phillips took this view to even more of an extreme in arguing that "eventually it could be said that the Negroes had no memories of Africa as a home."[86] Social anthropologists helped establish a more revisionist approach to this historiography, with Melville Herskovits disproving this "Myth of the Negro Past" - or lack thereof - when honing on specific elements of African American culture to prove cultural continuity with Africa.[87] Herskovits was selected by Granger as an advisor for the Savannah Writer's Project: thus his views influenced the aims of D&S in its search for cultural retention between the black communities of Georgia and their African roots.[88]

This chapter will focus on the role played by the Flying African story in challenging ideas of Africa and the perceived lack of cultural retention amongst African Americans. During slavery, the basis for the enslavement of Africans rested on the idea that they were "savages" who were "addicted to rapine and theevery."[89] This judgement of Africa was "filtered through the eyes of white traders", whose interpretation of African culture and customs significantly contributed to the development of a rationale that justified slavery.[90] The combination this image of Africa and the economic argument hence resulted in the European sponsored slave trade, which perpetrated these stereotypes and subsequently repressed the African culture that they saw as inferior.[91] This chapter will hereby assess the Flying African story's function as a retaliation against this, as the emphasis of Africa as their homeland in the stories, as well as the distinctively African elements mentioned in some retellings, allowed them to embrace their African heritage. It will be shown how this

[85] R.E. Park, 'The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures with Special Reference to the Negro', *The Journal of Negro History*, 4 (1919), 116.
[86] U.B. Phillips, *Life and Labour in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, and co., 1929), 195.
[87] M.J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1941), 12.
[88] Powell, 'Summoning', 259-260.
[89] D.D. Wax, '"A People of Beastly Living": Europe, Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade', *Phylon*, 41 (1980), 14.
[90] Wax, 'People', 13.
[91] Wax, 'People', 13.

enabled the spiritual reconnection with their heritage, whilst the belief that they could physically travel back to Africa allowed for a literal reconnection, serving the pedagogical function of showing the closeness of their African roots. The story functioned as a form of resistance in this sense, but this chapter will take this further in also examining the ways through which it challenged the underlying principles of slavery, through contesting the widely held views of Africa. It will demonstrate how instead of presenting Africa as a land of savages, the storytellers in lieu reinterpreted it as a place of knowledge and power so supreme that it was above the comprehension of the white slaveholding class who looked down upon them and their customs.

The stories strenuously emphasise that the higher powers which permitted flight originated in Africa, and thus were unique amongst Africans and their descendants. Jack Wilson exemplifies this when he talks about the "magic powuh wut come tuh um frum way back in Africa. Muh mothuh use tuh tell me bout slabes jis brung obuh frum Africa wut hab duh supreme magic powuh."[92] The contrast between the belief systems of African Americans and white Southerners becomes evident here. Whites saw black culture as confirming their belief of the inferiority and childlike nature of Africans, which in this case was influenced by their Western disbelief in magic, causing them to view the customs and conjure of Africans as backwards.[93] Conversely, the Africans' own understanding of this ability as "supreme magic power" reverses this to suggest that it was, in fact, the whites who were not as knowledgeable as their African counterparts.[94] This sees the black community essentially rewriting the hierarchy that the white slaveholding class imposed, now reinstating themselves at the top due to their superior supernatural abilities that transcended the capability of whites. W.E.B. DuBois proposes the idea of a "double-consciousness" that black Americans experience, which is a sense of twoness through being black but existing in an environment that "only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."[95] The Flying African story redresses this internal conflict by helping them to view their African heritage as a source of pride, as opposed to "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt," as they reclaim the perception of Africa by showing that it was a society that was

[92] *D&S*, 'Jack Wilson', 6.
[93] Levine, *Black Culture*, 141.
[94] *D&S*, 'Jack Wilson', 6.
[95] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), 5.

more advanced than that of the whites.[96] This adds to the idea of Africa as a utopia that the enslaved could escape to: a sanctuary which serves as a stark juxtaposition to the horrors of plantation life.

Other retellings go even further when they credit the original homeland as the source of this supreme power, in making a biblical connection with this ability. Thomas Smith cites events from the book of Exodus as evidence when recalling "Dat happen in Africa duh Bible say…Africa wuz a Ian uh magic powuh since duh beginnin uh histry…Duh descendants ub Africans hab duh same gif tuh do unnatchul ting."[97] This is particularly interesting given that the Bible was used to justify the enslavement of Africans under the Curse of Ham, whereby they were believed to be the descendants of a sinner, and thus subjected to eternal punishment.[98] Referring to these powers as a "gift" in the story of the Flying African allows it to function as a direct contestation of the perception of Africans that was held by the white slaveholding class: they were not a cursed group of people, but instead a race that was blessed with supreme magic by the Christian God himself. This again illuminates the nature of oral histories and storytelling, as whilst the act of flying is closely linked to African folklore, the biblical connection establishes its syncretism, alongside showing how the individual storyteller is able to add their personal beliefs to shape its message. In Smith's case, he reclaims the same Christianity practiced by white Southerners, and reinterprets it to uplift Africans.

At other times the story took on a more traditional African dimension, by citing a ritual or ceremony as preceding flight. McCullough observed that "All ub a sudden dey git tuhgedduh an staht tuh moob roun in a ring. Roun dey go fastuhnfastuh. Den one by one dey riz up an take wing an fly lak a bud."[99] Historians have connected this to the 'ring shout' dance practiced by enslaved African Americans and continued by their descendants, a dance which in itself combined a multitude of African traditions, and like the Flying African folklore was thus unique to black people in the United States.[100] This dance was particularly popular in Georgia, so its inclusion in the story may be another example of the black historians bringing in aspects of their lives to make

[96] DuBois, *Souls*, 6.
[97] *D&S*, 'Thomas Smith', 25.
[98] S.R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71.
[99] *D&S*, 'Priscilla McCullough', 146.
[100] Miles, 'Haunted Waters', 156.

it more applicable to their own personal situation. Additionally, the distinctly African nature of the ritual may hold significance: since it was performed before an act that was believed to enable its participants' homecoming to Africa, it could have served as the first stage of them connecting with their cultural roots, which would culminate in their return to Africa.[101] This aspect of the Flying African story enabled it to function as an act of resistance, by being a symbolic marker of African-American counter-culture in the midst of the plantocracies repressing any indication of African continuity, such as through preventing ceremonials, and the banning of drums.[102] The Georgia slave codes themselves are a testament to this suppression. Drums were used to signal the Stono Rebellion of 1739, which took place in the neighbouring state of South Carolina: following this, the Georgian law ruled that it was "absolutely necessary to the safety of this province" that slaves be prohibited from "using and carrying mischievous and dangerous weapons, or using and keeping drums".[103] The folklore thus takes on a dual form of resistance at a time where the enslaved were forbidden to connect with their roots, by enabling them to not only embrace these cultural traditions, but also take pride in these rituals as a supreme source of power that would allow them to access the sacred gift of flight.

Similarly, some recollections did not require a ritual, but instead involved the need for a specific phrase or incantation to permit flight. Prince Sneed remembered the phrase clearly, testifying that "Duh dribuh say 'Wut dis?' an dey say, 'Kum buba yali kuni buba tambe, Kum kunka yali kum kunka tambe,' quick like. Den dey rise off duh groun an fly away."[104] Powell uses Winifred Kellersberger Vass' 'The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States' to translate this phrase, suggesting that it says: "He is tricky, so I will win by being tricky, too! He asks clever questions, so I will win by using clever questions too!"[105] Based off of this translation, Powell makes the case that this story was "used to dupe unsympathetic FWP workers", and imagines Sneed and his friends laughing over fooling the fieldworkers.[106] Given that the enslaved subjects of the story are speaking to their overseer, in this case it seems more likely that the phrase was a taunt aimed at him. Powell's interpretation, however, could demonstrate the binary function of the phrase

[101] Miles, 'Haunted Waters', 156.
[102] Rice, *Radical Narratives*, 89.
[103] W. A. Hotchkiss, *A Codification of the Statute Law of Georgia* (Georgia: Charles E. Grenville, 1848), 813.
[104] *D&S*, 'Prince Sneed', 74.
[105] Powell, 'Summoning', 262.
[106] Powell, 'Summoning', 262.

permitting not only the enslaved Africans to fool their overseer during the days of slavery, but also the interviewees to fool the fieldworkers generations later, at the time of their interviews in the late 1930s. In these two different situations, the overseers and fieldworkers are viewed by the African Americans as on par with one another, both being seen as intruding outsiders who are agents of oppression.

Jack Wilson refers to a "magic pass wud" that would allow them to fly back to Africa, however stories such as his often give no more information than this.[107] It cannot be determined whether this was because they did not know the magical words that could enable flight, or because they wanted to protect this sacred knowledge from outsiders. Serina Hall hazards a guess at what the phrase could be when she remembered a story that her mother told her about a family, where "One ub duh daughtuhs wanted tuh lun tuh fly an wuk cunjuh. Duh faduh tell uh she hab tuh lun duh passwud... Attuh dis den she would hab duh powuh. Duh magic passwud mean sumpm like dis, 'Who loss duh key Branzobo?'"[108] She roughly knows what the magic phrase was, but is unsure of the exact wording. Both Wilson and Hall's stories are connected by the sense of hope that they create for the future. In Wilson's case, this comes from him noting that the Africans who had the pass word "would pass tuh udduhs", and Hall's from the uncertainty when recalling the exact phrase required. This implies that if the following generations of African Americans can one day recover the supreme knowledge that their ancestors had, then they too can access this gift of flight.

This chapter has thus demonstrated that by its very nature, the Flying African story reminded African Americans of their connection with their roots, both by utilising cultural traditions as a means of facilitating flight, and Africa serving as the story's destination. Moreover, it embodied a challenge to the racist beliefs that underpinned the oppression of black people in the US, through seeing Africa as a source of pride and empowerment, rather than associating it with inferiority and shame as the slaveholders intended. Most notably, the symbolism behind Africa as a place of refuge - where they themselves could one day escape to if they could simply discover the lost password - went further in providing them with a sense of hope that bore resonance not only during the horrors of slavery, but also in the wake of racial oppression even after the Civil War.

[107] *D&S*, 'Jack Wilson', 6.
[108] *D&S*, 'Serina Hall', 75.

Conclusion

Through accounting for the polysemic nature of the Flying African story, by assessing both the literal and figurative interpretations that it had to the black historians of D&S, this study has illustrated its multiple functions.

Firstly, it disproved racial misconceptions that were held by the slaveholding class, all of which rested on innate stereotypes of black people. Chapter One achieved this by demonstrating the ways through which the Flying African story evidenced the capacity of the enslaved to resist against their condition. Chapter Two attested to the strength and value of the black family, by proving its pervasiveness in the Flying African story, and thus paving the way for its continual emphasis amongst generations of African Americans in Georgia to whom the story is passed on to. Similarly to the first chapter, it also presented this in the context of resistance against the assumed moral inferiority of the enslaved, as well as resistance against the separation of the black family, allowing for its restoration not only in a literal sense in the story, but also memory: a continuing legacy, as the folklore continues to be told. Finally, Chapter Three saw the perception of Africa and Africans being repaired, by no longer presenting it as a land that was cursed and laden with 'savages', but instead one of people blessed with knowledge and power so supreme that it could not even be fathomed by the white slaveholding class, let alone suppressed.

Secondly, this thesis has illustrated the role of the Flying African in alleviating the suffering of the past. This was achieved through exhibiting the ties that the Flying African story has with two of the most significant historical events in Georgian history: the Igbo Uprising, and the Great Slave Auction. Bringing in elements of these events lets the African American storytellers partially rewrite the painful history of their ancestors, and in doing so, inject a newfound sense of empowerment into their collective understanding of their past.

This has thereby revealed the wider implications of the story, and thus its third function: representing a symbol of hope for the future. This reverberates throughout all chapters of this thesis, through demonstrating resistance and the reclamation of black agency in Chapter One, the faith of reuniting with family again in Chapter Two, and the depiction of Africa as a land worlds

away from the oppression of the United States in Chapter Three. The very fact that the story persisted after emancipation shows that during the oppression of the Jim Crow system of the South, whilst they were no longer enslaved and working on the plantation, there was still a "lasting search for a sanctuary" away from the racial discrimination and intimidation they faced in their daily lives.[109]

In 1969, Julius Lester, former Field Secretary of the Student Non-Violent Co-Ordinating Committee, included the Flying African story in his book of Black Folktales. Writing in the aftermath of a peak period of civil unrest, he suggested that "Maybe one morning someone will awake with a strange word on his tongue and, uttering it, we will all stretch out our arms and take to the air, leaving these blood-drenched fields of our misery behind."[110] The existence of this retelling and others is a testament to the long-lasting impact of the black historians of D&S. The "fields of misery" that Lester refers to are not the plantation, but an expression of the dissatisfaction of an entire generation of African Americans, as he reflects the continual racial oppression that existed in the US, even after the perceived success of the Civil Rights Movement. This shows the resonance that the Flying African story still bore to future generations, as it allowed them to draw attention to the fact that racism towards black Americans did not end when the Civil War and Jim Crow did. It thus enabled Lester to convey this frustration, whilst at the same time projecting a lasting message of hope that they will one day be able to live a life free of racial oppression.

Whilst this study has focused on the meaning of the Flying African story to African Americans living in the Jim Crow era, it also stresses that its message of resistance does not end there. It therefore not only invites, but necessitates further study of the contemporary role of the Flying African folklore to deduce its current significance, and what this can reveal about the contours of the African American experience in the present day.

[109] Young, 'All God's', 51.
[110] J. Lester, *Black Folktales* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 152.

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