

**“I SAW MRS. SARAY, SITTING ON A BOMBALERRY”:
RALPH ELLISON COLLECTS CHILDREN’S FOLKLORE**

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Along Harlem streets, in housing projects and on playgrounds, Ralph Ellison employed his formidable gifts for observing and rendering speech play as a collector of children’s folklore. His collecting for the Federal Writer’s Project (FWP) in 1939 represented one dimension of a life long engagement with African American folklore. It extended from traditions acquired in his youth in Oklahoma City through works of fiction employing multiple folkloric genres and essays discussing the centrality of folklore for the African American experience and its indispensable role for cultural resilience. Collecting at a time of heavy African American migration from the South, Ellison researched folklore that embodied both a Southern heritage of largely rural character and traditions adapted to a new urban environment.

As a New Yorker who moved permanently to Harlem in 1938, Ellison experienced first hand the struggles of recent arrivals adjusting to a vastly different social and cultural situation. Remarking on these challenges in “Harlem is Nowhere”, written in 1948, he wrote of how “American Negroes are caught in a vast process of change that has swept them from slavery to the condition of industrial man in a space of time so telescoped ... that it is literally possible to step from feudalism into the vortex of industrialism simply by moving across the Mason-Dixon line”. In Harlem, the “folk personality” was “caught in a process of chaotic change” (321, 325). Writing on “Harlem’s America” in the *New Leader* eighteen years later, Ellison saw continuity as well as change in Harlem’s folklore, where “you see the transformation of the Southern idiom into a Northern idiom,” in “a place where our folklore is preserved, and transformed” and “the body of Negro myth and legend thrives” (1966, 28).

The modern and the traditional were also at play in Ellison’s own fiction. He was one of the great modernist writers of twentieth century literature and, without contradiction, infused folklore throughout his work. Influenced by existentialism and writing surrealistically, counting Eliot, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, and Malraux among his literary “ancestors,” (1995f, 185) Ellison all the while incorporated folklore in his work at least as much as any of his peers. Writing in 1958, he stated that “I use folklore in my work not because I am a Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance,” and he found early in his career that the “Negro American folk tradition became precious as a result of an act of literary discovery” (1995d, 111, 112). A few years after seeing that “in both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* ancient myth and ritual were used to give form and significance to the material” Ellison came to “realize that the myths and rituals which we find functioning in our everyday lives could be used in the same way” (1995g, 216). The “grist for my fictional mill” included “details of old photographs and rhymes and riddles and children’s games, church services and college ceremonies, practical jokes and political activities observed during my prewar days in Harlem” (1994, xxvii).

For Ellison and other major mid- and late- twentieth century writers, field research for the FWP provided indispensable source material, which was utilized along with experiences remembered from their working class youths in subsequent literary works. In *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning notes that "the writings of the plebeian writers who worked on the projects – Algren, Ellison, Himes, Tomasi, Sincliar, Conroy — embodied a dialectic between fictional invention, autobiographical reflection, and urban fieldwork" (1996, 228). The FWP represented for Ellison and many other writers their first employment as cultural workers. Through the WPA arts projects, the numbers of people employed as artists increased vastly, and many of them, like Ellison, saw that it was possible to make a living through their creative work. In *New Deal Modernism*, Michael Szalay contends that the WPA Arts Projects "led to new ways of conceiving literary labor", creating a "newly professionalized industry of salaried writers (2000, 5), acting as, according to Denning, "a way-station for the young plebeian artists and intellectuals of ethnic working-class backgrounds who would go on to careers in the federal bureaucracies, the culture industries, and the universities" (48).

Making a living for the first time through his cultural work for the FWP, Ellison collected personal narratives from compelling Harlem characters (published many years later in Ann Banks's 1980 anthology, *First Person America*), carried out extensive research about local African American history for a planned publication, "The Negro in New York," (which was never published) and took to the streets to collect children's folklore *in situ*. Rhymes, games and other forms of children's folklore were collected as a major focus of the FWP in New York City. In New York City, Ellison was among a group of FWP workers supervised by folklorist Herbert Halpert, who instructed them to "look for children's rhymes, making specific note of the nationality of the reciter, the place of collection, and any comments made by the children. Since the workers were untrained, a questionnaire for each collector's guidance was prepared" (1946, 5). In all, about 1000 items of children's folklore were collected, and Ellison contributed approximately 100 different items. He observed children at play and noted contexts while recording texts, conducted interviews with adults as well as children, probed their memory culture, and even contributed folklore remembered from his own childhood.

Consisting mainly of folk rhymes, the children's folklore collected by Ellison included texts retained from Southern tradition as well as others transformed and localized to New York City. While many were maintained largely or entirely within African American tradition, with some exhibiting African derivations, others were part of repertoires shared by New Yorkers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. In his master's thesis, "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children", which included rhymes collected by Ellison, Halpert singled out African American and Puerto Rican children as each having "unique" rhymes, while noting that they also perform variants of nearly all the rhymes he collected elsewhere in New York City. However, Halpert found that rhymes introduced to Harlem by migrants from the south are not disseminated elsewhere in New York City (1946,15). He suggested that a "large part of the stock of rhymes and games ... held in common by White

and Negro children dates from before World War I," when the "color barrier" was not as strong, and the African American population was smaller (16).

Whatever their cultural source, the rhymes collected by Ellison were distinguished by their innovative and improvisatory qualities, features often noted by him and consonant with the high value placed upon innovation within tradition in African American folk culture. According to Halpert's proposal for a book based upon the entire New York City FWP children's folklore collection, *Children's Rhymes and Games*, more old English rhymes make their appearance" in African American children's folklore "than in any other group, but there are, on the other hand, considerably more innovation and invention." They were also distinguished by "a greater variety of subject matter and rhythmic pattern" than the rhymes of other groups in the FWP New York City collection (n.d., n. pag.).¹

The Ellison children's folklore collection is housed in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. While some of the folk rhymes he collected have been previously published, they lack the information about Ellison's collecting process and the tradition bearers that appear in the collection housed in the Library of Congress and which I am including in this article.² In the collection at the Library of Congress, we see the collector at work as he observed, interviewed and recorded texts of children's traditions. At times, Ellison recorded variants and versions of the same folklore item. He had a keen eye for observing creativity in process through improvisation, and delight in word play suffuses the collection. Ellison recognized the musicality of the rhymes, noting "polyphony" on one occasion, and referring to performance as "chanting," implying that they could be viewed as being somewhere between speech and song. The rhymes contained influences from popular culture, specific local references, topical references, and content reflecting harsh urban realities like problems in paying rent and gun violence.

Much of Ellison's field research occurred near his home at 25 Hamilton Terrace. One report, dated October 13, 1939, described field research on "the streets and playground located in the area extending from 125th St to 145th St and between St. Nicholas and Lenox Avenues." This report contained the most complete accounts of Ellison's field research on children's play, offering multi-layered descriptions of the collecting situation. He presented multiple dimensions of text, context and performance rarely before provided in collections of children's folklore.

One group of children demonstrated improvisation and individual creativity as they performed a taunt, followed by improvised lines to what Ellison called a "jingle," and a riddle. He describes their performance of folklore as an emergent process, rather than as repetition of a fixed text. We see what Hymes has called a "breakthrough into performance" as interviewees move from *reporting* folklore to spontaneous *performance* (1981, 79-86):

Buster Brown

When you see a guy got on brown pants you say:

Buster Brown

Went down town

With his britches hanging down."

When the above was given other members of the group chimed in with the following. While most of the jingles appear to have a set formula, there were many attempts at improvisation. Each voice followed the other in rapid succession, giving an antiphonal effect as varied as the colors named.

"Yellow, Yellow
Kiss a fellow."
"Blue, Blue
I love you"
"Black, Black
Sit on a tack"
"Green, green
Eat ice cream
Stick your nose in kerosene"
"White, white,
You can fight"

Hey Mister, if you shut up in an iron house without any windows and
you didn't have nothing but a baseball bat?

In an Iron house?

Yeah, yeah that's right. Come on sister, what'll you do?

Well, I guess I don't know.

Gee, don't you know how to play baseball? Anybody who can play
baseball knows how to get out there.

Well how would I get out?

Three strikes and you out, Mister ...

You see what he means, THREE STRIKES AN YOU OUT!³

Thickly describing these performances, Ellison anticipated the approach to folklore as emergent performance and situated small group interaction developed in folklore studies three decades later.⁴ One actually sees folklore as it is created, as "living lore," the term of FWP national folklore editor Benjamin A. Botkin, who stressed that folklore is "living speech ... responsive to the mood of the moment," which, rather than disappearing, was still being created, in urban as well as rural areas (1958, 190). As Hirsch indicates, Botkin's *Manual for Folklore Studies* instructed collectors to "submit complete field notes from every interview together with a personal history of the informant" (1988, 58). While Ellison regrettably submitted minimal personal information about almost everyone he interviewed, his field notes, at their best, provide highly textured accounts of the collecting

of folklore in, and as, performance. In his later fiction writings, he would vividly render the performative and improvisatory qualities of speech in general, and oral folklore in particular. These writings embody a "collaboration ... between oral and literary techniques and traditions; between performance and composition" which John F. Callahan sees in "Frequencies of Eloquence: The Performance and Composition of *Invisible Man*" as intrinsic to *Invisible Man* (1994, 89). While Ellison scholars have long emphasized the influence of improvisation in jazz upon his fiction, his folklore collecting for the FWP demonstrates an emphasis upon improvisation, emergence and performance in folklore which reemerges in subsequent literary works.

Ellison's field research involved close observation of children at play as well as interviews with both adults and children to elicit traditions both in active tradition and memory culture. He drew reports and performances of folklore from tradition bearers young and old who recalled folklore from a younger age. His October 13, 1939 report included a series of descriptions of traditions both reconstructed from memory and actively practiced, with some traditions presented in the sequence in which they were performed:

Helen Simons, of 201 W. 139th Street, gave the worker the following chants. Helen is now eight years old and had some difficulty in remembering some of the chants since "only the little kids play them." The following verse was sung to the tradition melody of "Pop-Goes the Weasel!" and as far as Helen knew is not used in any of the games the children in the neighborhood play.

I went up to Mary's house
Mary had the measles.
This is the way the measles go,
Pop! Went the measles.

The following rhyme was chanted very fast and like the above was not used in a game:

Once upon a time,
Goose drink wine.
Monkey chewed tobacco on a street car line.
Street car broke,
Monkey choke
And they all went to heaven on a streamlined boat.⁵

"When we play 'Blue Bird' in my window we all stand in a circle and one girl skips around behind us and we all sing:

Blue bird, Blue bird
In my window ...

And when she gets to the one she wants to be next she taps him on the shoulder and sings:

Oh, Johnny I'm sorry.

Or whatever the kid's name is. Then the one what got tapped skips around and you go like that.”

London Bridges All Broke Down
(Sung, to the tradition melody)

London bridge is all broke down
All broke down, all broke down.
London bridge is all broke,
My fair lady.

London bridge is half built up,
Half built up, half built up,
London bridge is half built up,
My fair lady.

London bridge is all built up,
All built up, all built up.
London bridge is all built up,
My fair lady.

Mrs. Julia Fisher of 2816 Eighth Avenue sung the following words to a slightly varied melody of “Little Sallie Walker.” Mrs. Fisher learned this version as a child in Key West, Florida:

Little Sallie Water
Little Sallie Water
Sitting in a saucer,
Crying and weeping for a young man
Oh, rise, Sallie, rise,
Wipe your weeping eyes,
And turn yourself to the water front
And tell them who you love the best.⁶

Versions and variants of “Little Sally Walker” and “Little Sallie Water” have been collected widely in the United States, including two versions collected by Zora Neale Hurston in Florida and included in her writings on folklore for the FWP, *Go Gator and Muddy the Water* (1999, 100, 101-102). Another “Little Sallie Water” was collected by Ellison at the Utopia Children’s House. He described it as a “singing game” in which “the child chosen as ‘Sallie Water’ stands in the middle of circle as the others sing the song. She goes through the directions of the verse pantomime.”

Little Sallie Water
 Sitting in the saucer
 Rise, Sallie rise,
 Wipe your winking eyes
 Turn to the East, my darling,
 Turn to the West, my darling,
 Turn to the very one that you love the best
 Put your hands on your hips,
 And let your backbone shake my darling
 Shake it to the East, my darling
 Shake it to the West, my darling
 Shake it to the very one that you love the best.

A group of young girls demonstrated singing games substantially maintained from Southern folklore, embodying the creolization of traditions. One game included a refrain, "Sail Away, Sail Away, Sail Away," well known in Anglo-American folk song. A tap dance, perhaps a new element, was introduced in another game. Had moving images and/or sound recordings also been used, African cultural sources for these games might be adduced, since, as Bess Lomax Hawes has noted in notes to the film "Pizza Pizza Daddy-O," African American singing games "stylistically, especially in terms of musical and kinesic elements ... seem equally clearly African, or at least Afro-American as British and Anglo-American in derivation" (qtd. in Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1976, 69). At times, such as in the following accounts of "Buckeye the Rabbit," "Lady in the River" and "I Had a Little Dog His Name Was Buster," Ellison demonstrates how the singing games of African American girls involve a tight interrelationship between song and movement, which Kyra D. Gaunt, in *The Games Black Girls Play*, sees as "embodied musical practices" (2006, 2) incorporating "intrinsic" relationships between movement and music (7).

"Buckeye the Rabbit," in another variant, appears in *Invisible Man* as the narrator experiences electroshock treatment after the factory accident. Asked "Who is Buckeye the Rabbit?" the narrator responds in a manner both "giddy" (1972 [1952], 183) and grounding, a moment which, Keith Edward Byerman notes in *Fingering the Jagged Grain: Tradition and Form in Recent Black Fiction*, brings out "cultural history" which "prevents his total loss of identity" (1985, 27). The narrator in *Invisible Man* remembers that "I was Buckeye the Rabbit ... or had been, when as children we danced and sang barefoot in the dusty streets" (1972 [1952], 184). In Harlem, Ellison had observed children dancing as they sang in this children's singing game played in both the North and the South:

Buckeye the Rabbit
 I'm riding through Kentucky
 I'm riding through the sea,
 And all I catch behind me
 Is a buckle on my knee
 Buckeye the Rabbit,

Shake it
Shake it
With a buckle on my knee,
I swing to the bottom
I swing to the sea
And all I catch behind me
Is a buckle on my knee
So Buckeye the Rabbit
Shake it
Shake it
So Buckeye the Rabbit
Shake it
Shake it
With a buckle on my knee.

The worker observed this game played by a group of five girls, four of whom joined hands and formed a circle around the fifth. All five took part in singing the above verses up to the line "Buckeye the Rabbit" upon which the girl in the center began dancing steps from a tap dance routine. One girl, Mary Suarez of 259 W. 139th St., sung the following words as she continued to dance after the others had finished one of the songs.

"You jump to the front
And you jump to the back
And you do the snake-hips 1,2,3
A riding to the sea."

The others joined in:

"So Buckeye the rabbit,
Shake it shake it etc.

Upon finishing this, girls took her place in the circle and one of the others took her place, whereupon the same routine began again. The game is flexible and allows for the use of varied dance steps. The worker was informed that this game was learned from other children, while one girl, Catherine Mason, said she learned it in Richmond Va.

Lady in the River (*a game song*)
There's a lady in the river
Sail away, sail away, sail away
There's a lady in the river
Sail away,
Looking for her lover
Sail away, sail away, sail away.

Then she found her lover
 Sail away, sail away, sail away
 Then she found her lover
 Sail away, sail away, sail away.

This game was not played for me but the lyrics were sung.

Helen and Fredric Lewis vividly described and demonstrated another singing game. Ellison noted that it was "spoken rhythmically":

"I had a little dog his name was Buster' is a game that had a rhyme to it. You pick some body to get in the circle and when we sing they shake their duster." Helen placed her hands upon her hips and sang, while Fred stamped his foot and clapped his hands:

I had a little dog,
 His name was buster.
 I sent him to the store to shake his duster
 Oh, come on, buster
 Shake your duster.⁷

When she came to the end of the verse she shook herself and flipped the tail of her dress.

Helen Lewis offered what she claimed was an original, collectively created "taunt". It expresses the competitiveness and fierce identification that many New York City residents have felt for their own block. In *City Play*, Dargan and Zeitlin note that streets, like public schools, buildings and playgrounds, are often identified by number in New York City, but can be the subjects of great pride. They describe play about such numbered places, and indicate that while "identified by number seemingly anonymous places in a crowded city are rendered meaningful through play" (1990, 10). This "taunt" contains, like older rhymes of Southern provenance collected by Ellison, the formulaic refrain, "buckeye the rabbit," along with newer content.

"When the 134th Street girls get together we all say this rhyme, we made it up ourselves."

Take off your shoes and stockings,
 and let your feet go bare.
 For we are the girls from One hundred-thirty-four
 So don't you dare come near.
 So, buckeye, the rabbit,
 Shake, shake
 Buckeye the rabbit
 Shake, shake
 So don't you dare come near.

Ellison documented several folk rhymes on October 13th used for quick repartee between friends or acquaintances. This speech play seems as if it might be primarily used by older children and adults:

"You know this one, mister?
See you meet a guy you know and he's doing something good
and you say "Gee, that's fine!"
And the other guy says, "wine!!"
And you say, "Sho nough, that's fine as wine,
As a Georgia pine
Two old grandmothers drinking wine."
"Here's another one. You ask me 'Gimme a nickle'"
"Gimme a nickle."
"Go down town and tickle."
"You want a dollar? Go on, say 'yes'"
"Yes"
"Go up on the roof and holler!"

Ellison recorded a number of ball bouncing rhymes found, with variations, in other New York City neighborhoods and ethnic groups. Ball bouncing involves hitting a rubber ball or tennis ball with the open palm, with the bouncing in time to the rhyme (Halpert 1946, 41). Ellison asked the children performing the rhymes about acquisition and observed that the traditions were learned from other children rather than adults – a characteristic of children's folklore that folklorists have noted wherever it is collected:

The following are rhymes chanted by little girls while bouncing their balls and were collected at the corner of 141st Street and Hamilton Terrace, Manhattan. None of the children questioned were able to tell where they learned the rhymes. In each instance they replied that they had been taught by "another girl", or "another kid." Sometimes the writer was told that certain rhymes were the original creations of the child involved, but in no case was I able to obtain a rhyme which had been taught a child by his parents.

One Two Three a Nation
One, two, three a nation,
I received my confirmation
In the Church of the Annunciation
One, two, three a nation.⁸

One, two, three a nation
Doctor, doctor here's a patient
Waiting for an operation,
One, two, three a nation.⁹

One Two Three O'Lerry

One, two, three, O'Lerry,
 I saw Mrs. Saray
 Sitting on a bombalerry
 Just like a chocolate ferry.¹⁰

I Had a Little Monkey

I had a little monkey,
 I sent him to the country
 To buy a loaf of bread.
 Along came a choo choo
 And knocked my monkey coo coo
 And now my monkey's dead
 With a bullet in his head

Charlie Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin went to France
 To teach the ladies how to dance
 This is what he taught them:
 "Heel and Toe, Clap your hands and over you go."¹¹

A marginal note by Ellison alongside "Charlie Chaplin" indicates a "contemporary reference." He collected other rhymes featuring such figures from radio, film and comic strips as Charlie McCarthy, the Lone Ranger, Rin Tin Tin and Buster Brown. Remarking on the use of characters from popular culture, Halpert said that "girls blithely incorporate their heroes and heroines from these media (a startling number) into the world of play" (1946, 48).

Like "Charlie Chaplin," another rhyme which appears in Ellison's October 13th report, "Gypsy, gypsy lived in a tent" was used as both a jump rope rhyme and counting out rhyme.

Gipsy Gipsy

Gipsy, gipsy lived in a tent,
 She couldn't afford to pay her rent.
 She borrowed one
 She borrowed two,
 She passed it over to y-o-u¹²

The October 13, 1939 report was unique in its substantial number of detailed accounts of folklore in performance. On other occasions, Ellison relied entirely upon interviews, apparently recognizing that it would have been preferable to observe spontaneous performance. A report dated December 15, 1939 noted that because of the "weather and the seasonal character of the games I was unable to see, and hear, these games in the actual play situation." He reported that these rhymes "were received near the corners of 134th and 135th Streets and Lenox Avenue, around Public School 89" and "in all instances the informants were born

in New York City, though several said that their parents came from the South." P.S. 89 itself was the subject of two rhymes. In his book proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games*, Halpert indicated that there were few rhymes in the entire New York City FWP collection which referred to schools, with the exception of derogatory ones (like the ones reported by Ellison). In this collecting situation, Ellison noted the effect of his presence upon the performance:

Most of the rhymes in this group were collected in the vicinity of Public School #89 and in every instance the informant was a boy. The following rhyme reveals one boy's attitude toward P.S. #89; the first version before he knew the words were to be taken down, and the second, more respectable version, when he saw the pencil put to paper.

Remember the Eight
Remember the Nine
Remember that 'City Dump' 89

Remember the Eight
Remember the Nine

Remember that 'White House' 89

Ellison's remarks about his impact as a collector upon the content of these rhymes reflects his awareness of the dynamics of subject/object relationships in fieldwork situations. He became at once both the subject and object of his own research when he acted as his own informant. Interspersed among the texts collected in Harlem are several items of children's folklore remembered from his Oklahoma childhood. Ellison, after all, was part of the great migration of African-Americans to Northern cities, and he retained his own memory culture of Southern tradition even while moving in literary circles and beginning his writing career in New York City.

Ellison remembered a "choosing rhyme" from 1925. Other versions of this widespread counting out rhyme have been reported from Canada, England, Scotland and the United States:¹³

My mother and your mother
Were hanging out clothes
My mother hit your mother
Right in the nose
O-U-T Spells Out!

A "taunt" was remembered from 1920, when he was about six years old:

Patty on the brooms tick
Patty on the sea

Patty tore his britches
And layed it on me

Another taunt, from 1922, was "used to taunt white children as well as for the choosing of sides":

Enny meany minny moe
Catch a white peck by the toe
If he bites you let him go
Enny meany minny moe!

Both Ellison's texts and children's folklore collected from non-African Americans in New York City for the FWP include a number of taunts referring to other ethnic groups. Coming across the taunts in these collections came as no surprise to me, having grown up in the Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s and remembering folklore performed by members of various white ethnic groups referring disparagingly to other groups, most viciously about African Americans. Taunts, whether with ethnic reference or not, are a widespread genre of children's folklore. Halpert indicates that "the pattern of insulting another group" has long been practiced in the United States, although sometimes they "reflect an attitude that children do not feel with any particular force (1946, 17, 19). They are pervasive among children, and Jorgensen, in "Teases and Pranks," notes that as "forms of victimization", represent "behaviors that children are likely to experience at almost any time and in any place." Taunting, especially when it involves "socially unacceptable words or taboos," is "usually not done in the presence of adult authorities, but otherwise it is a fairly everyday type of occurrence" (1999, 213-14). The large number of taunts collected by Ellison testifies to his ability to establish rapport with his research subjects. They included taunts referring to various kinds of other groups. One, about "crackers," collected on 142nd and Eighth Avenue from William and Eddie Freeman, was both pithy and pointed. The Freemans reported, "that's what we used to say when the white boys made us mad":

Cracker, cracker ring the bell
Cracker, cracker go to hell!

Children who "cannot read well" felt the signifying sting of another taunt:

Can you read
Can you write
Can you smoke your daddy's pipe?

An overweight child was the target of another taunt:

Fat and skinny had a race
Fat fell down and broke his face
Skinny said I won the race

Fat said that ain't fair
Cause I lost my underwear

"Delaware" rhymed easily with "square" and "fair" (for the 1939 World's Fair) in a taunt used for "strangers":

Look at them squares
From Delaware
They musta got left
from the World's Fair

Ellison noted that the following version was recited "when a stranger or out-of-town license on a car driven by Negroes, is noticed." The last two lines were recited by Herbert Lambert, sung to the tune of Shave and a Haircut. Lambert, who recited other rhymes for Ellison, used this tune "to end off every verse he gave."

I'm a square from Delaware
Just in town to see the Fair
Boom da dee ah dee
Boom, boom!

While Lambert is named as the tradition bearer, Ellison usually did not give the names of the performers. An unusual amount of personal history was provided for William and Eddie Freeman, who like many other African American New Yorkers, before and since, spent time during their childhood visiting relatives in the South:

The following rhymes were given the writer by William and Eddie Freeman, who operate a vegetable cart in the Eighth Avenue market near 143rd Street. William was born in Charleston, South Carolina but was brought to New York when three months old. Eddie was born in Conn. During 1936 the boys visited relatives in Charleston and the "Cracker Cracker" rhyme was learned there. Eddie chose to recite the rhymes and during the recitation was advised by William not to use the word black, but to use the word dark instead. The boys are twelve and thirteen years of age.

Once upon a time
A darkey found a dime,
Dime turned red,
The darkey fell dead

I know something you caint tell
Three dark niggers on a peanut shell
One kin sing,
One kin dance,
One kin sew my old man's pants.

Topical references appear in other items collected by Ellison. The Opies, in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, categorize such rhymes as "topical rhymes" since "the era in which it belongs is immediately apparent," but caution that a "topical rhyme" may be a version of much older rhymes (1959, 98). Halpert found widespread reference to "contemporary events, personalities and institutions" in rhymes collected during the 1930s (1946, 14). Joe Louis appears in the following rhyme, with a notation in Ellison's hand about the "trucking" dance :

Joe Louis and Bob Pastor
 Bob Pastor was on his knees
 Said, "Joe,
 Don't hit me please,
 Just go on trucking on out the ring."

(Use) This rhyme tells the story of the Pastor-Louis fight, which took place in 1939. The term 'trucking' refers to a dance step popular at that time; a version of which was inspired by Louis' peculiar, shuffling footwork.

According to Halpert, children "quickly became adept exponents of truckin'," introducing it in a number of songs and games" (1946, 114). He indicated that the "truckin'" rhymes were not known outside of Harlem. Halpert viewed them as a kind of emergent folklore, as "for the most part recent compositions either based on older rhyme forms or composed from scratch" (15-16).

Another rhyme was chanted rhythmically to African American dance steps which "were popular in New York around 1928":

Hay, hay,
 Farmer gray,
 Took another
 Load away

Ellison collected a ball bouncing rhyme about an encounter with a policeman guarding Macy's department store. While this rhyme was found among other ethnic communities in New York City, it might have had special resonance for residents of Harlem. During the mid and late 1930s, struggles against discrimination in hiring in department stores were a focus for African American political activism. This rhyme illustrates how children's folklore (in any culture) provides mechanisms for working through issues, concerns and anxieties through play:

I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more!
 There's a big fat policeman at the door, door, door
 He grabbed me by the collar
 And made me pay a dollar
 And I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more!¹⁴

Only a few jump rope rhymes appear in the collection. As in ball bouncing rhymes, the rhymes used for jumping rope act to structure movement, as Sullivan notes in "Songs, Poems and Rhymes" (153). Halpert, in his proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games*, speaks of how specific words may be used to indicate actions. In the first of the two rhymes which follow, the rope jumper is expected to either straddle the rope or miss her turn, allowing the jumper to avoid a "faux pas". Both of these rhymes are found extensively in Anglo-American tradition and Great Britain:

I know a lady
By the name of miss
Sat by the fire and gave me a kiss
All of a sudden
She missed like this!¹⁵

Johnny on the ocean
Johnny in the sea
Johnny broke a windowpane and blamed it on me
I told ma
And ma told pa
And Johnny got a beating and ha ha ha¹⁶

Ellison almost always presented ball bouncing and jump rope rhymes as texts, without describing the form of the activity which the rhymes accompany. An exception was the following ball bouncing rhyme, with Ellison's comments alongside the text:

I live in Chinka China
My name is Carol See.
I wash and dry the dishes
For fifty cents a week.
So sister, sister, sister
You ought to be ashame
To marry, marry, marry
A man without a name.
So my father is a butcher
My mother cuts the meat.
I am a little hot dog
hat runs across the street.

This is one of the longer ball bouncing jingles. The repeated words represent variations in the bouncing, for instance on the words 'Sister, sister, sister' the leg is crossed over and the ball bounced over it, after which the bouncer returns to the straight pattern.

A rhyme beginning "Your old man is a dirty old man" was collected in different versions and variants by Halpert in various parts of Manhattan. He characterized it as an adaptation of the song "Old Dan Tucker", well known as a minstrel song in the nineteenth century. For Halpert, it demonstrated how some children's folklore in New York City can contain the "remnants" of older adult folklore (*Children's Rhymes and Games*). The version collected by Ellison includes a street address in the Lower East Side, on the other end of Manhattan from Harlem:

My mother and your mother
Live across the way
315 East Broadway
Every night they have a fight
And this is what they say
Your old man is a dirty old man
He washes his face with the frying pan
He combs his hair with the leg of a chair
Your old man is a dirty old man¹⁷

Ellison ascribes various genres to the folk rhymes he collected. Categorization of children's rhymes, however, is a tricky business. Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett contend that taxonomies created through categorizations of rhymes cannot be "predictive" since the same rhyme in different play groups can accompany jumping rope, ball bouncing, or taunting another child (1976,67).¹⁸

This "gag" collected by Ellison was also recited in my own childhood in the northwest Bronx, with the addition of a "the" before "ice":

Ladies and gentlemen
Take my advice
Pull down your pants
And sit on ice.

A variant called for movement:

Ladies and gentlemen
Take my advice
Pull off your pants
And slide on ice.¹⁹

A very short verse collected by Ellison was labeled a "baseball rhyme." Short verses were found widely among New York City children — Halpert speaks in his proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games* of the "distinctly New Yorkese rhyme which is short, snappy and to the point."

In and out
Three strikes and out

Another rhyme was used as a mnemonic, with Ellison noting the use of such rhymes in the South:

Columbus was a Jew
Fourteen-ninety-two!

(Use) Such rhymes are used to aid the memory; in this instance it is a historical date which is memorized. In the South, superstitions, moral and other observations are given such a statement.

A "dare" was also categorized by Ellison by its "use":

You can slip
And you can slide
But I'll kick you for a buggy ride.

(Use) - Dare

Some rhymes were classified as "pastimes." The polysemy of the word "bill" was at play in one of these rhymes. As Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett note, it embodies two kinds of rhetorical patterns found in children's rhymes, "adnominatio (pun and wordplay) and conversio (repetition of the last word in successive phrases)" (1976, 109). Variants of this rhyme were recorded by other FWP fieldworkers among Italians and Puerto Ricans in East Harlem, and in the Bronx and Brooklyn among performers whose ethnicities were not indicated.

Well hello Bill
Where you going Bill
Down Town Bill
What for Bill
To pay my gas bill
How much Bill
Ten dollar bill
So long Bill

Some rhymes were uncategorized by Ellison. The text of a rhyme which improvised upon a popular song was followed by a note about continuities between African American folk and "commercial" song:

Margie is a swimming pool
All around the house
But never in the pool
Well allright then ...

The above rhyme is an improvised lyric to a popular song, originating in Harlem, the title of which is "Well All Right Then." This title, which

gives the tune its refrain, is nonsensical as far as actual meaning is concerned. And as is typical of such Negro songs, the pattern of "WELL ALLRIGHT THEN" is very elastic in order to allow for such improvisations; a characteristic which comes out of the folk period of Negro music and which has been carried over into the commercial.

African American children's rhymes and singing games have continued to incorporate popular music. Kyra Gaunt shows that this relationship works both ways in an ongoing circulation between folk and popular traditions, citing many examples of rhythm and blues, blues and hip hop songs appropriating children's game songs (2006, 2-3, 68-69, 89-110). Ellison saw how such use of popular song underscores the fluid, improvisatory character of African American music, characteristic of both a "folk period" when African American music consisted largely of folk music, and his own time, when commercially produced popular music had become a dominant force shaping cultural preferences. In referring to continuity and change in African American music, Ellison speaks to transformations in Black American culture occurring during the interwar period, when he was working for the FWP. He collected traditions brought by migrants from the South who maintained them in Harlem, as both active and passive carriers of tradition. These traditions were often adapted, localized and changed by children in Harlem, who also performed traditions maintained as well by other ethnic groups, and practiced emerging folklore newly created in New York.

In *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*, O'Meally indicates that Ellison perceived Southern sources "even when the Harlem lore seemed indigenous," and he would sometimes "recognize a remnant of a saying or rhyme he had heard in the South reduced to a 'mumble' or nonsense phrase in Harlem." O'Meally discusses Ellison's contention that these traditions suggested a bridge to the south and to African ancestry, and he cites Ellison as stating that their "tradition goes way back to the South, and some of it goes back to Africa" (1980, 34). While much of the children's folklore collected by Ellison was distinctively African American in provenance and current practice, some of these traditions were also practiced by whites, including traditions with sources in Great Britain. In Zora Neale Hurston's collections of African American children's folklore in Florida, she noted that they included "white games that have been learned by Negro children in contact with whites" like " 'London Bridge is Falling Down', ... white games that have been modified by Negro use, like 'Little Sally Walker', and purely Negro games like 'Bama,' 'Rabbit Dance,' and 'Chick-Mah-Chick'" (1999, 105) — a pattern like that of the games Ellison collected in Harlem. The critical essays and fiction of Ellison embody his views of the creative genius and cultural distinctiveness of African American cultures, the importance of Southern roots, and the Americanness of African Americans, all characteristics evident in the children's rhymes he collected early in his career.

The children whose rhymes were collected by Ellison experienced both tradition and change, through their folklore as in other aspects of their lives. In his own life at this time, Ellison was experiencing personal and professional transformations as a migrant as well as a writer. Like other FWP folklore workers,

he collected during the day and wrote in the evenings (35-36), working for the first time as a full time cultural worker, now possessing a primary occupational identity as a writer.

Ellison's experiences collecting folklore resonated in later works of fiction and short stories. O'Meally notes that "the project's structured examination of language and folklore planted seeds that helped his writing grow beyond the limits of literary realism" (1980, 36). He writes of how the "process of interviewing and transcribing" the narratives "sharpened Ellison's ear for idiosyncrasies of speech and gave him practice in getting particular speech patterns onto paper"(34)." His performative and improvisatory renderings of African American speech and oral traditions of various genres demonstrates, as Callahan puts it, a "commitment to an American improvisatory vernacular" (89). Rather than serving only illustratively, folklore was deeply infused within Ellison's fiction. Ellison viewed the use of folklore in fiction as absorbing "folk tradition into ... thematic structures ... plots, symbolism and rhetoric" (1995d, 111). As his collecting was informed by both text and context, so was his fiction, as O'Meally indicates:

Many of the rhymes, jokes and peculiarities of speech which enrich Ellison's fiction were drawn from his experience in Oklahoma and Alabama; many others were drawn from notes he made while researching and interviewing in Harlem for the Federal Writer's Project. Beyond simply copying bits of already collected folklore into his fiction, Ellison developed a working knowledge of Afro-American rhymes, games and stories. Moreover, he refined his sense of the folkloric context: the moments and the settings in which persons, particularly Afro-Americans, were likely to use the stylized speech of folklore. He studied text as well as context. In his fiction ... the lore is more than local color; it is ritualistic as well as reflective of a whole lifestyle (1980, 35).

Folklore also figured multifariously in Ellison's essays and creative non-fiction. Drawing from wellsprings of memories from his Oklahoma boyhood, formative years as Tuskegee student and migrant to New York, and keen observations as a FWP field researcher, he possessed an abundant store of folklore material borne out of first-hand experience. While working for the FWP, Ellison was associated with leftist politics and wrote about folklore in publications self-consciously identified with the working class. The writers for these publications, who were of working class origin, asserted, according to Michael Denning, "pronounced class awareness or consciousness" which framed "working class ideologies" central to a "cultural front" that shaped American culture for generations to come. (8). During this early phase of his literary career, Ellison authored essays and reviews about folklore found among African Americans and elsewhere in the world which Marxist literary scholar Barbara Foley, in her article "Ralph Ellison as Proletarian Journalist" sees as demonstrating "a materialist and internationalist approach" which views "folklore as a site of resistance" Ellison definitively rejected Communism by the mid-1940s and became increasingly critical of

the Left. Nevertheless, he continued to see folklore as a means of resistance despite a profound ideological shift which has been variously interpreted by Ellison scholars. Foley contends, for example that his view of folklore remained consonant with the ideology of the popular front, arguing against critics who saw the representation of folklore as resistance in *Invisible Man* as representing "a culturalist tendency antipathetic to Marxist analytical categories" (1998-99, 543). As Rampersad demonstrates in *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*, Ellison's immersion in leftist intellectual circles and, eventually, in the New York literati, was accompanied by personal disengagement from participation in African American vernacular culture. Nevertheless, even as he became personally more distant from working class culture, he continued to strongly assert the significance of folklore for African American cultural resilience and survival.

As a young writer, Ellison was profoundly influenced by the Cambridge school's view of the relationship of myth and ritual, especially Lord Raglan's archetypal study of the hero. He was also inspired by the applications of mythology and folklore by Eliot and Joyce, and he came to see that African American folklore could be used in his fiction as well. According to Rampersad, this revelation emerged during Ellison's collecting of folklore in Harlem for the FWP. "Ironically," Rampersad states, "exploring New York street life had taken him back into the arcane world he had entered in exploring the footnotes of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and especially the indebtedness of Eliot to Jessie Weston and other British scholars in the so-called Cambridge school of myth and ritual studies" (2007, 116).

The Cambridge school's approach to folklore differed greatly from other twentieth century folklore scholarship, including the approaches of both comparative, text oriented European folklorists and American folklorists engaged in ethnographic studies of living traditions. Its conceptualization of the origins of myth in ritual is unverifiable and reductive, positing relationships belied by systematic field research. For Ellison, there was apparently no contradiction between his systematic collecting of folklore in a project guided by ethnographic methodologies and the inspiration his studies of myth and ritual brought to the genesis of *Invisible Man* as well as his essays about African Americans.

Ellison viewed folklore as central for understanding African American culture, and over the years he increasingly spoke in terms of both its universal significance and cultural specificity. In "Richard Wright's Blues," published in 1945, Ellison saw the blues as a quintessential African American art form, "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" (129). A 1948 *New York Star* article, "A Journalist Considers the Position of the Negro in American History," contended that "Negro Americans ... evolved, from disparate influences, a folk culture embodying ... a conception of human life, a 'style,' a musical culture, a somewhat crude psychology, and a very advanced philosophy of human freedom" (qtd. in Rampersad 2007, 240).

Later writings argued against reducing African American folklore to archetypes and seeing it *primarily* as a vehicle of resistance, as they stressed its transcendent value for African Americans in particular and humankind in general. In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," written in 1958, Ellison criticized Stanley Edgar

Hyman's view of the archetype of the trickster in *Invisible Man*, with Ellison asserting his freedom as a novelist to create characters with specific cultural resonances. He stated that "spirituals .. blues, jazz and folk tales" have "much to tell us of the faith, humor and adaptability to reality necessary to live in a world which has taken on much of the insecurity and blues-like absurdity known to those of us who brought it into being" (112). His 1964 review of *Blues People* argued against its sociogenic approach and emphasis upon the blues as a means of political protest. He underscored the universal significance of the blues and its importance as an art form along with its value for African Americans as a technique of cultural survival. For Ellison, the blues "speak to us simultaneously of the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined these modes" (286).

Folklore was integral to Ellison's view of African American culture as a major shaping force in the lives of all Americans, and the continuing cultural interactions of blacks and whites throughout American history. Stressing the importance of the vernacular in American culture, and Black influence on American culture, a news release for Ellison's first course at New York University in 1970 stated that it would be "exploring the relationship between sophisticated and vernacular culture in the United States ... one of the abiding phenomena in this country starting from our American and British background." European cultural traditions had come "into ceaseless contact with the imaginations of Negro Americans who have been in the unique position of being inside the society and yet outside" (quoted in Rampersad 2007, 471).

Ellison's collections of children's folklore for the FWP incorporated traditions distinctive to African Americans as well as others shared by New Yorkers and other Americans from diverse cultural backgrounds. While Ellison did not note that many of these traditions were also practiced by non-Blacks, their provenances reflected the interactions through culture of blacks and whites as well as the distinctive contribution of African Americans to American life, themes which ran through Ellison's writings over the years. In his scathing critique of *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka (known at the time as LeRoi Jones), Ellison contends that "Jones has stumbled over that ironic obstacle which lies in the path of anyone who would fashion a theory of American Negro culture while ignoring the intricate network of connections which binds Negroes to the larger society. To do so is to attempt delicate brain surgery with a switchblade" (1964, 283). Mutual influences between African Americans and other Americans were seen by Ellison as continuous and ongoing. In "Some Questions and Some Answers," written in 1958, Ellison wrote of a "body of folklore" as among the fundamental expressions of "American Negro" culture, but hastened to add that "it must, however, be pointed out that due to the close links which Negro Americans have with the rest of the nation, these cultural expressions are constantly influencing the larger body of American culture and in turn influencing them" (292). While recognizing the reciprocal cultural influences between African Americans and other Americans, Ellison viewed African American folklore as a hallmark of African American cultural genius, asserting humanity and creativity over centuries of oppression. Much of African American folklore,

like many of the children's traditions Ellison collected, is distinctively African American in character, created and shaped by blacks in the Southern United States and Harlem. Like folklore, fiction by Ellison and other African American writers counters dehumanizing representations of their culture²⁰, following from the imperative Ellison states in "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Mask of Humanity" for "Negro writers" to take on the "task of defining Negro humanity" (1953, 99), a task which for Ellison integrally involved folklore.

While Ellison's FWP folklore collections have enduring significance as a foundation for both his fiction and non-fiction, they also have substantial but unrecognized value as folklore collections on their own terms, drawing from multiple cultural sources while demonstrating creativity in the creation of emerging traditions. Reading Ellison's field notes and texts of seventy years ago from the standpoint of a folklorist trained in the performance centered approach to folklore study, I am struck by his accounts of performance situations, his sensitivity to performance styles, and the contextual details he provided. Contemporary folklorists should also be impressed by his frequent notes about the uses of particular traditions and his remarks about distinctive features of form and the localization of particular traditions.

As a writer, Ellison was a literary modernist who wrote stylistically advanced fiction deeply infused with folklore, representing African Americans maintaining traditions while experiencing modern life. As a folklorist, he was a modern folklorist, observing and reporting context while recording texts, collecting older traditions maintained by southern migrants, folklore localized and transformed in the city and emerging urban traditions. Rather than seeing folklore as residual culture, as static relics of a Southern past, Ellison projects a dynamicist view of the children's folklore he collected as emergent in performance. Folklore, and speech in general, are viewed performatively, marked by improvisation and innovation. Folk culture is located within modernity, rather than outside it, through the folklore research he carried out at the outset of his career as well as in subsequent fiction and essays about African-American culture. Tradition and modernity are intertwined throughout the body of Ellison's folklore research and literary production, embodying a view of the traditional and the modern in dynamic interaction rather than as disjunctive forces. While Ellison's brief period collecting folklore occurred early in his career, it represented a highly formative episode in his literary career which continued to reverberate on many levels.

NOTES

An earlier version of this work was presented at the American Folklore Society's annual meeting in Milwaukee in 2006. Research for this article was carried out while I was a Non-Resident Fellow of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research at Harvard University. I am grateful to Roger D. Abrahams, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Felicia R. McMahon and John F. Szwed for their encouragement and critical comments about this article.

1. While the manuscript for the proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games* in the Manuscript Collection of the Library of Congress does not include the

author's name, Halpert refers to it an account of his early career in "Coming Into Folklore More Than Fifty Years Ago." He recounted that he was "fired" from the FWP, "mainly because the book I had proposed, on New York City children's lore, was thought to be too large a project – one that would take too long to reach publication" (451). The proposed book was never published.

2. Nine "Children's Street Rhymes" in this collection were included in a book of photographs by Aaron Siskind, *Harlem: Photographs 1932-40*, taken for the "Harlem Document" initiative associated with the Photo League, as Battle indicates in "Harlem: A Document" (2-6). *The Book of Negro Folklore*, edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, has a section "Harlem Children's Rhymes and Gags" in a chapter on playsongs and games, which included four items collected by Ellison, each framed by either Ellison's notes or comments by the children reciting the rhymes (433-35). A number of the rhymes collected by Ellison also appeared in Halpert's master's thesis.

3. All of Ellison's transcriptions of children's rhymes and associated field notes are reprinted here as they appear in the reports held in the Manuscript Collection of the Library of Congress, without emendation, except for small changes to regularize spelling.

4. During the 1970s, the academic discipline of Folklore turned from an emphasis on textual analysis to a performance-centered approach. Viewing folklore as artistic communication in small groups, it focused upon how folklore emerges in face-to-face interaction, and its social and cultural context. In their "Introduction" to an issue of *Western Folklore* marking the twentieth anniversary of the landmark *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* which articulated the new approach to the study of folklore in context and as performance, Shuman and Briggs write of how "style, content, and context" were "brought under a single theoretical aegis as they were studied in particular, situated acts of communication" (114).

5. Abrahams indicates that this rhyme derives "from a formula opening of English tales" (145).

Versions of this rhyme were collected by Johnson on St. Helena Island (134, 137, 155) as opening formulae for folk tales:

Once upon a time
Monkey chaw tobacco an' spit white lime

Once upon a time
Monkey chaw tobacco an' de cat drink wine

Once upon a time, a very good time
Monkey chaw tobacco on de railroad line

6. Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes suggest that little Sallie's last name as "Water" is found in "perhaps the oldest versions" of this game of British origin which they collected as an African American ring play. They note that the concluding stanza, "Shake it to the East/Shake it to the West," is an African

American addition to this game (1972, 107).

7. Hale and Hale indicate that the expression "Shake Your Duster" dates to the second decade of the twentieth century or earlier, when it had an "admonitory" purpose, to "speed up a person's effort in the business at hand," and they "suspect it may refer to long coats, or 'dusters'" which the "first automobilists" wore "when the motor car was young." (1938, 918).

Another version collected by Ellison had a more plausible rationale for the visit to a store:

I had a little dog
His name was buster
Sent him to the store
To buy some mustard
Oh well a come on
Buster
Bring that mustard!

8. Variants of this rhyme were recited throughout New York City, its suburbs, and in Northwestern Connecticut. Halpert notes variants of this rhyme recited in New York City, with a different third line, as "On the day of decoration" or "On the day of declaration" (Folk Rhymes 172). In her dissertation, "Folk Jingles of American Children", Dorothy Howard indicated that "the day of declaration" variant was found in East Orange, New Jersey, Nangotuck (sic), Connecticut and Westchester County (1938, 115).

9. Halpert notes that this rhyme was also collected at Greenwich House, in Greenwich Village (1946, 172). Greenwich House served a largely immigrant population at the time.

10. This rhyme was also reported from throughout New York City. A variant included in "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children" was transcribed (or spelled) differently, as "One, two, three a-lairry,/ I spy Mrs. Sarey,/ Sitting on a bumble lairry,/Just like a chocolate fairy" (1946, 171). Howard reported a version from "New York State" as "One, two, three a-larry/I spy sister Sarrie/Sitting on a bumbleberry/ Eating Chocolate like a fairy" (1938, 116). Ethel and Oliver Hale indicated that "no one has told us what a bumble-airy or bumble-eery is, so we must assume it is a concocted word, created to fit a rhyme scheme" (1938, 126).

11. Abrahams provides 39 references from throughout the United States of variants and versions of "Charlie Chaplin" as a jump rope rhyme (1969, 26-27). In New York City, Halpert reports, in "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children" that Charlie Chaplin as counting out rhyme and jump rope rhyme included a variety of last lines, "And turn yourself around," "And turn around to the submarine," "And turn your back to the Kaiser," from Greenwich and Church House, Jones House and Greenwich House, respectively.

12. According to Halpert, "Gypsy, gypsy, lived in a tent" was found throughout New York City (1946, 192). Abrahams notes, that it is more frequently found as a counting-out rhyme than as a jump rope rhyme (57) Versions of this rhyme are found in England and Scotland (Abrahams 1969, 57; Abrahams and Rankin 1980, 87).

13. Abrahams reports that more common versions than the one Ellison remembered begin with the same two lines, but the following lines say;

My mother gave your mother
A punch in the nose
What was the color of the blood?
Blue [or Red]
B-L-U-E or R-E-D (152)

Halpert collected another version, from the West Side, as:

Your mother and my mother
Were hanging out the clothes
Your mother gave my mother
A sock in the nose.
What color was the blood?
'Red'
R-E-D (1946, 125)

14. Versions collected by Halpert had different third and fourth lines. In one from the West Bronx, "I socked him in the nose/And I stepped on his toes," in another from Jones House "I squeezed him like a lemon and sent him up to heaven, and, in a text from Brooklyn's Willoughby House, "He'll pull me by my pants/And make me do a dance ." Abrahams reports that as a jump rope rhyme, "I won't go to Macy's" has been collected in California and Nevis (1969, 97).

15. Abrahams references sixteen versions of "Miss, miss, little miss, miss:/When she misses she misses like this" from the throughout the United States, Britain and Scotland in *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*, including one from Britain which begins, "I know a woman/And her name is Miss (1969, 123-24).

16. In *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*, Abrahams lists references to versions and variants found in thirty one states and Scotland (1969, 102).

17. This rhyme is used both as a counting-out rhyme and a jump rope rhyme. Abrahams's *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary* and Abrahams's and Rankin's *Counting-Out Rhymes: A Dictionary* identify, all together, versions and variants from thirteen states (Abrahams 135-36, Abrahams and Rankin 154-55).

18. Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reference the research on rope skipping games of the Cooperative Research Project in *Rope Skipping Games: Language, Belief and Customs*, Tri-University Project on Elementary Education, University of Nebraska and U.S. Office of Education. 1968.

19. Another variant, which Halpert dates to 1918 from East 78th Street, was reported as "Ladies and Gentlemen/Take my Advice/Take off your Britches/And Slide on the Ice" (1946, 93).

20. Ellison's views of the received dehumanizing and distorted representations of Blacks in American literature are akin to Toni Morrison's notion of the "Africanist" presence in American literature discussed in her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).

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