



## Lecture 2: Music and Slavery in the United States

# **NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDRICK DOUGLASS**

# MUSIC & SLAVERY

- ✗ In his narrative, Frederick Douglass recorded how slaves "would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness."



# MUSIC & SLAVERY

- ✘ The music was often coded when it was used for communication, and this was one of the many ways that illuminate the defiance of the slaves.
- ✘ Nat Turner and his rebels killed over 50 slave masters in Southampton, Va., in 1831.
- ✘ There was the multi-racial attack on Harper's Ferry in 1859 led by John Brown.
- ✘ Along with these rebellions there were work stoppages and everyday acts of defiance.





# MUSIC & SLAVERY

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- ✘ The codes of the first negro spirituals are often related with an escape to a free country. For example, a “home” is a safe place where everyone can live free. So, a “home” can mean Heaven, but it covertly means a sweet and free country, a haven for slaves.
- ✘ The ways used by fugitives running to a free country were riding a “chariot” or a “train”.
- ✘ The negro spirituals “The Gospel Train” and “Swing low, sweet chariot” which directly refer to the Underground Railroad, an informal organization who helped many slaves to flee.
- ✘ The words of “The Gospel train” are “She is coming... Get onboard... There’s room for many more”. This is a direct call to go way, by riding a “train” which stops at “stations”

# MUSIC & SLAVERY

- ✗ “Swing low, sweet chariot” refers to Ripley, a “station” of the Underground Railroad, where fugitive slaves were welcome.
- ✗ This town is atop a hill, by Ohio River, which is not easy to cross. So, to reach this place, fugitives had to wait for help coming from the hill.
- ✗ The picture is of a house used in the Underground Railroad in Ripley, Ohio. (Reverend John Rankin & Jean Rankin Home Ripley, Ohio)



# MUSIC & SLAVERY

“Swing low, sweet chariot”



Chorus:

*Swing low, sweet chariot*

*Coming for to carry me home,  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.*

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home?  
A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home.

Chorus

Sometimes I'm up, and sometimes I'm down,  
(Coming for to carry me home)  
But still my soul feels heavenly bound.  
(Coming for to carry me home)

Chorus

The brightest day that I can say,  
(Coming for to carry me home)  
When Jesus washed my sins away.  
(Coming for to carry me home)

Chorus

If I get there before you do,  
(Coming for to carry me home)  
I'll cut a hole and pull you through.  
(Coming for to carry me home)

Chorus

If you get there before I do,  
(Coming for to carry me home)  
Tell all my friends I'm coming too.  
(Coming for to carry me home)

Chorus

# ASSIGNMENT 2: CHAPTERS 3&4

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## Chapter 3

1. How did Colonel Lloyd keep the slave boys from taking his fruit?
2. Why was it particularly difficult to be the slaves in charge of Colonel Lloyd's horses?
3. What is ironic about Colonel Lloyd's treatment of his horses compared to the treatment of his slaves? (English) \*
4. What happened to the slave who told Colonel Lloyd the truth about his master?
5. What is a maxim? (English)

# ASSIGNMENT 2: CHAPTERS 3&4

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## Chapter 4

1. Why is Mr. Austin Gore a “first-rate overseer”? What is the irony of this description of him? What is ironic about his name? (English)
2. What reason does Mr. Gore give for killing Demby the slave?
3. What other examples does Frederick give of his statement “that killing a slave, or any colored person,... is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community” (p. 41)? (History)\*