

Dance Day



Slave Dancers

Slaves often sang and danced while working as slaves. Many slave owners did not allow their slaves to dance, so Africans found ways of getting around this by using movements such as shuffling their feet that were not so noticeable. Slaves sometimes had free time on weekends. Sometimes during this free time they socialized and organized dance sessions called frolics. They often used their homemade instruments to provide the music for these frolics. Sometimes in good weather they carried blazing torches of kindling wood for light, or danced around a fire. In bad weather, they often used the interior of their cabins for the gatherings. Some of the dances they enjoyed were the **Juba, the Pigeon Wing, the Buzzard Lope, Mary Jane, and Turkey Trot.**

Slaves dressed in their best, adding pieces of ribbon or whatever they had. They often wore their shoes to the frolic, but then took them off to dance, so they didn't have to dance in "them field shoes". They did not dance with their partner "squeezed up close". They said they "danced respectable, shifting around from one partner to another and holding one another out at arm's length."

- ⇒ **Cutting the Pigeons** was described as "flapping your arms and legs around and holding your neck stiff like a bird does."
- ⇒ **Setting the floor** was said to be done by couple in turn. They would come up and bend over toward each other at the waist, and the woman put her hands on her hips, and the man roll his eyes all around and grin and pat the floor just with their feet, just like they was putting it in place. Sometimes it was done alone— either a man or a woman. Then they would set a glass of water on their head and see how many kinds of steps they could make without spilling the water.
- ⇒ **Dancing on the spot** was the same thing as set the floor—almost. It just meant that you got to stay in the circle. The fiddler would take a charred corn-cob and draw a circle on the floor, then call one after the other up and dance in the circle. If your feet touch the edge you are out.
- ⇒ In the **buck dance** a boy and girl would hold hands and jump up and down and swing around keeping time with the music.

Working in your group create a dance that you think may have been like one of these dances. Provide accompaniment for your dance with rhythms, and with the instruments you made earlier.

Perform your dance for the rest of the class.