

LET'S GET RHYTHM

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Handclaps, often overlooked and challenging to document, are a striking folklore tradition shared predominantly by young girls between the ages of five and eleven on every populated continent and many islands between. Participation in the handclap game reveals a fascinating exhibition of the cooperative nature of girlhood. The activity is child-initiated, tactile, and rhythmic. Upon close scrutiny this praxis is seen to be profound in its treatment of serious issues, even though initially it may appear mundane. The poetry is prosaic; the music, not much to note. Yet these games supply many meaningful observations of how young girls perceive themselves and others. It is a medium executed in plain sight whereby girls have private interactions that are nearly codified, without the need of any externally imposed structure. This paper discusses four distinct aspects of the genre: (1) enculturation in the formation of childhood social identity; (2) the influence of ethnic factors; (3) the use of audio-visual media in recording the genre; and (4) the constraints in classification of handclaps. It is my goal to expand appreciation of this worldly, though some would argue commonplace, activity by producing a documentary video based on fieldwork and research. The widespread appeal of the tradition can be more thoroughly appreciated by viewing the action. Peter and Iona Opie, highly respected children's folklorists in the English-speaking world during the middle and late twentieth century, wrote "A printed page cannot convey the exuberance of children singing these games" (*Singing Game* vii). The bond between the girls resonates in rhythm beyond any description on paper.

Handclapping games have been included in the domain of folklore for well over a century. Prominent folklorist Simon Bronner delivers an apt description of the phenomenon:

"[T]he tradition of hand-clapping games...involves performance and integration of different expressive behaviors that defies easy typology. Such games combine gestures, music, and words creatively arranged in rhyme. Socially, they vary according to ethnicity and region, and, significantly, age. Typically played between two girls, each using two hands, the hand-clapping games involve speaking four-line verses usually with alternate lines rhyming." (*American Children's Folklore* 166)

There are also a significant number of games with patterns that do not cross an individual's center axis inviting expansion of the game into a circle with any number of players. While this eliminates certain movements, it encourages the use of more complex rhythm patterns such as those in described by Jones and Hawes for "Hambone" (34-36) and "Mama, Mama, Can't you See" that I recently collected (see Appendix 2 for further discussion). Overall the rhythmic structures are relatively stable and repetitive. Variations in text abound, yet similar materials are found wherever English is spoken. Many rhymes cross over to jump rope and ball bouncing.

Study of the handclapping tradition demonstrates its contribution to the enculturation of young girls. These games have a social function in the realm of peer acceptance. There is no biological imperative. It is strictly a voluntary activity. No one officially takes lessons. No one is expected or forced to learn handclapping, yet the vast majority of girls go through a handclapping "phase." Games increase in complexity with the participants' ages and until the amusement fades as other interests prevail. Handclaps are generic gossip. They express concerns without personal specificity. The spontaneous activity provides a context for girl-to-girl communication. Simply by being included in a game, a girl feels socially accepted. Brian Sutton-Smith states that the approval of other girls grows increasingly important during this developmental stage of childhood (*Ambiguity* 44). All players perform identical tasks, cooperatively, with a goal of shared success. The rhymes and songs are repeated because they are entertaining. Though the activity is "performed," an audience is not necessarily desirable. A typical game takes less than a minute. Handclaps require minimal organization: two people, no special equipment or space. There is no way to commercialize handclap; nothing that can be packaged and sold. Rich or poor, girls pick up these routines from each other and pass them on (see Appendix 1 for a list of thirty common rhymes).

An ethnic group that has a strong handclapping tradition is Korean Americans. Both traditional Korean handclaps and American repertoire contribute to the girls' formation of social identity. "Pulen Hanul," a Korean handclap for two shown in my promotional video, has a gesture not found in American handclaps. With a diagonal and upward swing of their right arms, they brush the backs of each other's right hands. The same gesture is repeated using left arms and hands later in the four beat rhythm pattern. The movement is flowing, as befits a song about white boats, or clouds, floating high in the sky, according to a translation by UCLA graduate student Seungyen Lee in 2004.

Female commentary on racial, ethnic and sexual issues is imparted in many handclap games. The extensive distribution of certain texts discussed below, such as "Down, Down Baby," "Apples on a Stick," and "Miss

Susie Had a Steamboat," affirms the attraction to the forbidden. As much as young girls yearn to be "grown up," their feelings and anxieties about the changes they face in upcoming years need to be processed. The games are an agent of this enculturation providing stages for growth and passage outside parental guidance (Bronner, "Left to Their Own Devices" 107). They impart pre-conscious information that adults are hesitant to communicate to the young. Furthermore, they are fun, which alleviates some of the stress of figuring out how to fit in. It is unlikely that a little girl will learn the lines "Not because you're dirty, not because you're clean/ Not because you kissed a boy behind the magazine" (Bauer and Bauer 1) from a parent or teacher. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts when a child hears traditional material from another slightly older and "wiser," even if it includes taunts and insults, she will consider the intent impersonal and does not feel full responsibility in repeating it (73).

Although handclapping is a widespread tradition among different racial and ethnic groups (see Appendix 3 for a list of countries where handclaps have been collected), the tradition thrives in the African-American community. In the introduction to her dissertation *The Games Black Girls Play* (1997), Kyra Gaunt states:

For many days of my youth, games were a magical thread in the fabric of everyday life. Time stood still in those moments because a little girl's life was busy with handclapping and other games. The games, never discussed as cultural events or musical practice, were our private collection, our body of literature about us.(7)

Gaunt points out that the Slave Act of 1740 "banned using or keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments which may call together and give signs or notice to one another of [slave's] wicked designs or purposes"(98). Highly elaborate hand clapping and foot patting as accompaniment to songs, religious and secular, have long been a part of the African musical tradition. In her notes to the film *Pizza, Pizza, Daddy-O*, Bess Hawes states in the 1960s the games are the cultural property of black American children. The girls master the musical pulse and incorporate syncopations reminiscent of blues and jazz. A game such as "Miss Sue from Alabama" (see text below) coordinates a clapping pattern in triple meter with a rhyme in duple meter, producing a polyrhythm, an admirable musical practice throughout Africa and the reaches of the African Diaspora.

Coming from a tradition rich in encoded messages, African-American girls have a repertoire that includes rhymes dealing with taboo subjects, and not necessarily subtly. Although most adults turn a deaf ear to the lyrics on the playground, the girls often locate their game out of earshot of

anyone who might disapprove of what they are saying. One such rhyme that has been a favorite over the last forty years is "Down, Down Baby." The Langstaffs record a version that opens "The Blacks go down, down baby"(78) establishing ethnic identification. In predominantly African-American Marin City, California, this is the version I collected in October 2005.

Down, down baby, down by the roller coaster,
 Sweet, sweet baby, I'll never let you go,
 Shimmy, shimmy cocoa pop, shimmy, shimmy shy, (2x)
 Grandma, grandma, sick in bed,
 Mama called the doctor and the doctor said:
 Let's get the rhythm in the head. Ding! Dong! (2x)
 Let's get the rhythm in the hands. Clap! Clap! (2x)
 Let's get the rhythm in the feet. Stomp! Stomp! (2x)
 Let's get the rhythm in the ho-o-t dog! (2x)
 Put it all together, and what do you get?
 Ding, dong! Clap, clap! Stomp, stomp! Ho-o-t dog!
 Put it all backward, and what do you get?
 Ho-o-t dog! Stomp, stomp! Clap, clap! Ding, dong!

While chanting the line "Let's get the rhythm in the hot dog" the players rotate their hips, putting it all out there, in spite of adult disapproval of sexual subject matter. Of four other opening rhymes, three have a character who consumes alcohol, another unacceptable subject for the "sweet and innocent" girls; these have been documented as opening lines to the "Let's get the rhythm" sequence. The Opies report "When Jimmy got drunk on a bottle of gin,/ He called for the doctor and the doctor come in" from Stepney, followed by a note that "Dr. Knickerbocker, number nine,/ He sure got drunk on a bottle of wine" is the American version that also crosses over to a circle game(*Singing Game* 479). The Knapps report "Dr. Knack Knack, Number One/ He got drunk on a bottle of rum"(133). The Michaels and Whyte version, the fourth variant, is not lady-like either: "I Have a Boyfriend/Nabisco/He's so sweet/Nabisco/Like a cherry tree/ Nabisco/ Ahche ahche and a boom de boom/I need some money/ And I need it soon" (46).

Michaels and Whyte title their book *Apples on a Stick: the Folklore of Black Children* after the handclap which begins "Apples on a stick, make me sick,/ Make my tummy go two-forty-six"(11). These opening lines metaphorically refer to sexual intercourse, another prohibited subject among six- to eleven-year-olds. Many versions in the University of California at Berkeley Folklore Archives segue to more suggestive lyrics "... here comes (name, m/f) with the (tight/short) (pants/skirt) on." In her

doctoral dissertation *Eeny Meeny Pepsadeeny*, C. Merrill-Mirsky includes a variant says "with his pants undone"(104). There are certain implications regarding a girl who wears short or tight skirts or pants; there are different implications if it is a boy who wears the short or tight skirt or pants, not to mention "the undone pants." These are lines that authority figures label "inappropriate."

The lyric "That's the way, uh-huh, I like it" mimics the K. C. and the Sunshine Boys' song of the same title (copyright 1976) and carries a strong message regarding sexual pleasures:

That's the way, uh-huh, I like it,(2x)
 You got the looks, I got the brains,
 Peace, love, in your face,
 Brick wall, waterfall,
 Girl, you think you know it all.
 You don't, I do,
 So poof with the attitude.

The first time I heard the handclap, accentuated in African American style of speech, was in 2001, from a ten-year-old Alexandra Iwanicki of Tiburon, an upscale predominantly white suburb of San Francisco, who performed it with "attitude." My informant stated she learned it the first week of second grade on the playground from a friend who learned it at day camp over the summer.

Kids thrill in "getting away with" what will meet with disapproval if apprehended. A line such as "Here comes the lady with the African bootie" from "Mailman, Mailman" in the Marin City version appeals to kids for the same reason adults censor it. Published materials tend to edit out suggestive words and gestures, to "protect" young minds. From themselves? This cleansing obscures what children enjoy about, and learn from these games. In the attempt to enforce good manners, the parental guidelines modify the content and the game becomes vapid, in which case analysis is meaningless.

"Miss Susie Had a Steamboat" provides interesting example on the issue of taboo language. In *Handclap!: Mary Mack and 42 other Hand Clapping Games for Kids*, Sara Bernstein, age twelve, includes a "sanitized" version:

Miss Susie had a steamboat, the steamboat had a bell,
 Miss Susie went to heaven, and the steamboat went to
 Hello operator, please give me number nine,
 And if you disconnect me, I will not feel fine.

Compare this to a version found at www.geocities/Enchanted Forest/Glade.com (14 Mar 03), with "I can't even begin to describe the actions involved!" as opening comment:

Miss Susie had a steamboat, the steamboat had a bell (ding, ding)
 Miss Susie went to heaven, and the steamboat went to . . .
 Hell-o operator, please give me number nine,
 And if you disconnect me, I will chop off your. . .
 Behind the 'frigerator, there was a piece of glass
 Miss Susie sat upon it, and cut her little. . .
 As[s](k) me no more questions, tell me no more lies,
 The boys are in the bathroom, zipping down their. . .
 Flies are in the meadow, the bees are in the park,
 All the little boys and girls are kissing in the dark, dark, dark! . . .

The second version is much more likely to spread. The handclaps folder in the Folklore Archives at the University of California at Berkeley contains more than 130 variants of this handclap rhyme, and an additional 150 entries as either a jump rope rhyme or song. ("Say, Say Oh Playmate" is the only handclap to top "Miss Susie had a Steamboat" with 160 variants.) Why censor the pretended obscenity embedded in the poem? That is what makes it fun!

Collection of moving images of handclaps would make a valuable contribution to the classification and study of handclaps. It is possible now that the increased availability of video equipment makes documentation of movement much easier. In the past there was difficulty representing these games because of the challenges in delineating the motions. Alan Lomax's extensive audio collection of children's games from the 1930s on leaves the kinetic element a mystery. In notes for "Mosquito One," *There's a Brown Girl in the Ring*, performed by young girls in Massacre, Dominica, he comments "This somewhat surreal rhyme is accompanied by some tricky clapping performed by pairs" which gives insufficient information about moves more easily observed than explained. The recording audibly has hands clapping with various timbres indicating not just clapping but probably patting thighs or chest. Having visuals included would make the actions clear.

Jones and Hawes are more successful presenting "clapping plays" such as "Green Sally Up," "One-er-y, Two-er-y," and "One Saw, Two Saw," by indicating gestures above musical notation and lyrics: "R" for right, "L" for left and "O" for own, which suffices with this limited number of gestures. Hawes laments the complexity of the description, compared to the ease of "learning by doing" (19-37). Beverly Stoeltje uses similar gestural notation, and uses photographs when the movements are more varied, which happens often (*passim*). Sara Bernstein focuses primarily on

gestures. In her youthful enthusiasm she painstakingly breaks forty-two handclaps into sequences using seventy-two gestures, with a drawing for each one. Less attention is given to rhythm and melody, and (surprise, surprise), there is no analysis (*passim*).

Handclaps have been treated cursorily in film. "Cutaway" clips are found in *Mad Hot Ballroom* (2005), in *Ray!* (2005), in Michael Moore's *The Awful Truth: The Complete First Season* (2000), and in Teno's *Afrique. Je te Plumerai* (1992). Each depicts children contentedly handclapping as an expression of the joy in play and friendship for no more than ten seconds. A Folkways ethnographic collection *A Video Anthology of Music and Dance in Europe* includes a nineteen second handclap "Sing, Sang Sukh" from Iceland. Equally noteworthy, the earliest film documentation at the Library of Congress of a child-to-child handclap is "Pease, Porridge Hot," filmed by Alan Lomax in South Carolina in 1937, with a duration of twenty seconds. Written record of this game goes back to *The Newest Christmas Box* (1797) (Opie and Opie, *Singing Game* 440). Newell also included it in his collection *Games and Songs of American Children* with the comment that the gestures were "too complex to describe" (132). Z. N. Hurston's films, which constitute the earliest moving images of children's games at the Library of Congress, shot in Florida, circa 1927-29, have circle games with elements suggestive of handclapping, but no handclaps *per se*. (Recognizable games in these necessarily silent films, because they predate "talkies," include "Little Sally Walker" and "Draw Me a Bucket of Water.")

The opening scene of movie *The Color Purple* (1985), set in the South circa 1920, takes place in a flowering field with two girls handclapping. Director Steven Spielberg deftly uses a handclap not included in the book by Alice Walker as the connective tissue emphasizing the closeness of the sisters Celie and Mattie. The handclap connection returns in shadow effect to signify the imminent separation. As one might blow a kiss, the two sisters communicate through handclaps in the air. The sisters handclap again when reunite years later. The sight of two sisters handclapping effectively evokes their intense bond. The poster for the new musical *The Color Purple*, that is opening on Broadway as I finish writing this paper, December 2005, likewise depicts the two sisters handclapping in a flowering field. Will this bring a resurgence of handclapping?

In 1976, Kate Rinzler documented children's games in Washington, DC, on half-inch helical scan reel-to-reel video, a format now obsolete. She collected many familiar handclaps and other children's genres. She also taped what appears to be an emergent form, referred to as "cheers," "stepping" or "routines." Unfortunately this material is inaccessible due to the lack of funding to reformat. Eve Harwood reports similar activities in Chicago (24); Dargan and Zeitlin describe the practice in Brooklyn in 1985

(167); Gaunt and Merrill-Mirsky each mention "cheers" in their unpublished doctoral theses. The participants, ages between nine and twenty-plus, no longer face each other, but are in formations suggestive of cheerleading or drill team. Handclaps are often incorporated. The improvised text is frequently obscene. Girl-lore has expanded in a new direction, and it should be preserved, if for no other reason, for archival purposes.

A more recent film representation of the handclapping tradition is *Clap to It!* (1997), a "how to. . ." video for kids, with a "politically correct" selection of boys and girls demonstrating "clean cut" versions of the games, and followed by a narration that goes over the gestures in order for the viewer to learn. Unmoved myself, I wonder whether any children actually learn handclaps from this video. The treatment does not explore context and gives no analysis. The video includes "Miss Mary Mack," a well-known handclap rhyme with opening words that the Opies have traced back to 1865 to white children in Boston (*Singing Game* 469). An interesting feature of this handclap is that the regular four-beat clapping pattern opens with a "cross down" gesture where the players start by tapping their own shoulders with their arms across their chests, like a body lying in state. Roger Abrahams, in *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary* notes that this rhyme (no. 334), like many other handclaps, has currency as a jump rope rhyme as well. He observes that the opening, "Mary Mack, dressed in black, with silver buttons down her back," is a riddle for a coffin, citing Archer Taylor's *English Riddles from the Oral Tradition*. Folklorist Alan Dundes enlivened his lecture on handclaps with this tidbit. A little insightful commentary of this nature would enrich the *Clap to It!* video.

Classification of handclaps is fraught with difficulties. Unlike folklore methodology for the comparative study of folktales and proverbs, handclaps have no type or motif index. Therefore any comparative work on the collection and classification of handclap texts lack cohesion and offers a challenge to the collector. The multiplicity of variations adds to the complications. Undue emphasis is given to text omitting the kinetic and musical aspects. Connections between handclap versions are difficult to delineate. The inclusion of materials generated by popular culture compounds this problem. Sometimes words from a popular song or a commercial jingle are tacked onto rhymes from the oral tradition. One example is "Rockin' Robin" (copyright 1958). The melody and the six lines of lyrics that follow the opening form the basis for the handclap, after which a verse of separate origin has been juxtaposed:

Ring, ring ring, to the rhythm machine.
 He rocks in the treetop all day long
 Huffin' and a-puffin' and singing his song
 All the little birdies on Jaybird Street

Love to hear the robin go tweet, tweet, tweet.
 Rockin' Robin, tweet, tweet-a-leet (2x).
 Mama's in the kitchen burnin' rice.
 Daddy's in the alley shootin' dice.
 Brother's in jail, raising hell
 Sister's in the alley, selling fruit cocktail
 (UC Berkeley Folklore Archives).

The second verse, considered "inappropriate" by parental figures, has a separate history. This exposes another obstacle to classification of the games. The common practice is to name the routine by the first line of the text, regardless of interchanged verses after the first sequence. Many standard verses are often mixed in different combinations, although only one version will prevail at any one location. The interchangeability of verses renders the cataloguing individual games problematic. Extensive data processing could improve this situation even though variants occur randomly. The Opies trace "I rode uptown to see Mrs. Brown" to 1850s in Suffolk (*Singing Game* 441); in 1977, the children at Sunnydale Children's Center in San Francisco recited "I went downtown to see James Brown." At that time James Brown's name was a household word, and that is exactly why the kids used it.

Variations occur from one playground to the next as well as to the far reaches of areas where the same language is spoken. Diffusion patterns are irregular. When memory fails, children invent "reasonable facsimiles" using their own words and passages, and combining a variety of rhymes from different sources. Some games even move across linguistic boundaries. The Opies refer to a version of "My Mother Said" in Chinese. They also cite an earlier version from Lancashire in 1875 (*Singing Game* 446); Brian Sutton-Smith presents a version from New Zealand (*Games of New Zealand Children* 85); Alan Lomax recorded it embedded in "Mosquito One" in Dominica in 1956 (*There's a Brown Girl in the Ring*, band 25); yet the only instance I have found of this rhyme in any collection from the United States is one entry in the UC Berkeley Folklore Archives.

Often the gestures and body movements associated with handclaps are omitted from text collections. The folklore archive collections at UC Berkeley, however, contain many drawings and photographic attempts to help convey the motions of handclaps. Once again the challenges of documenting this genre are evident. Due to a lack of standardized format, each contributor develops his/her own style of charting these moves—a folklore genre in and of itself. Each collector's drawings require new interpretation in order to compare versions. After reading so many verbal descriptions and attempts to chart the movements, I champion filming the genre. It is an expedient manner of showing the genre. While readers must

process an exhaustively long, involved description of the coordination of the words, melodies and gestures of each game on the written page, viewing twenty seconds of moving footage makes it all clear.

New gestures, openings and endings may be changed or added over time. "Pepito au Chocolat" has a unique gesture. This handclap, collected from nine-year-old Hannah Futterman of Corte Madera, in March 2003, is based on a French commercial jingle from the 1970s. She learned it the previous summer while visiting mother's family in France. Each girl, with the fingers of both hands intertwined, taps palms across to her partner's hands, right against left, and left against right, and then they spin around separately. The incorporation of various forms of footwork has been increasing in recent years. The final gesture, where each attempts to poke the other faster after the last word of the routine, is an ending also found in "Shame." Contrast this to the final gesture in "Miss Sue from Alabama" collected from an informant in Fort Bragg, CA, 1994, the players see who can "freeze" the longest at the end:

Miss Sue, Miss Sue, Miss Sue from Alabama,
 Sitting in a rocking chair, eating Betty Crocker,
 Watching the clock go,
 Tick-tock, tick-tock, banana rock,
 Tick-tock, tick-tock, banana rock,
 A-B-C-D-E-F-G, wash those spots right off of me.
 Moonshine, moonshine. FREEZE!

(UCB Folklore Archives)

The Library of Congress Folklife Archives has audio recordings by John and Alan Lomax from as early as 1934 in Atmore, Alabama, and Shreveport, Louisiana, of this rhyme, without the "freeze." Lesley Steinbach reported the same handclap in New York in her 1994 doctoral dissertation *A Study of Clapping Games* and has "freeze" in the second-to-last line, with no indication of the gesture (27). In "Slide," a handclap included in my promotional video *Hand Jive*, the final gesture contains only one word in this handclap. Each time the general pattern is repeated the players insert an extra internal pattern that progresses arithmetically. Upon reaching a pre-established goal, they say "slide" while they slip their hands between each others'. Demonstration is easier than description. The current accessibility of film/video provides new possibilities for accurate documentation. Seeing the action, as opposed to reading a verbal description, would help in the comparison of the characteristics.

Variation is often achieved through recombination of rhyming verses lacking any apparent correlation to geographic or historic factors. In the version of "Funny Little Dutch Girl" I played circa 1956 "My boyfriend's

name is *Tony*, *He comes from the land of Boloney*"; Alan Lomax collected the same version at Friar's Point, Mississippi, 1942 (Library of Congress: Selected Listings). Another widely reported version seems to be "Fatty...comes from Cincinnati" (Opie and Opie, *Singing Game* 452). The Opies report variations such as "Switzerlatti", "Sixolatti" or "Madagassi" (*Singing Game* 452). Robert Atkinson reports "*Sissy-nati*"(3). Other variations include "Michael...rides a motorcycle" (see Opie and Opie, *Singing Game* 452n); "Jello...comes from Monticello" (Withers 3); "Santa...looks like a banana"[sic], "Kevin...comes from Heaven", "Harry... comes from the land of Berry", and "Larry...acts like a canary" (Atkinson 3); "Herbie...comes from Plains, New Jersey" (UC Berkeley Folklore Archives, c. 1954); "Arnie...comes from the US Army" (Abrahams); "Davy...comes from the US Navy" (from my own collection, 2002); "Martin from the Isle of Tartan" (Opie and Opie, *Singing Game* 452). The Opies report a variant of this rhyme as "*Pretty Little Dutch Girl*" (*Singing Game* 450). The fact that the rhyme had crossed racial lines and thousands of miles deserves attention. The fact that this particular line invites variation shows a way in which this genre supports identity formation and creativity within a small space. (Incidentally, this boyfriend may have "rings on his nose," "forty eight toes," "a pickle for a nose"—just to mention a few of his outstanding qualities.)

Despite the number of variations in the versions of "Funny Little Dutch Girl," one consistency is a shared melody with several other well-known handclaps. It is a melody simple enough to be remembered after several repetitions. The same melody accompanies "A Sailor Went to Sea, Sea, Sea" and "Miss Suzie (Lucy) Had a Steamboat." Though most musicians would find nothing extraordinary in this melody, it supports other rhymes as well, for example "The Bedbugs and the Cooties." The lyrics have nothing in common with the other rhymes to the same melody:

Oh, I woke up one morning and gazed upon the wall,
 The roaches and the bedbugs were having a game of ball,
 Oh the score was 19-20, the roaches were ahead,
 The roaches hit a homerun that knocked me out of bed!
 Oh, I went downstairs to breakfast, the toast was hard and
 stale

The tea tasted like tobacco juice, the kind you get in jail,
 Oh, automatic butter and systematic cheese,
 Indian rubber sausages and double-jointed peas,
 Oh, the peas took a flip-flop and landed in the soup,
 And we all got the jim-jams from eating rotten soup!

(U C Berkeley Folklore Archives, 1963)

Most informants are not aware of the melodic identity, just as most children are not aware that "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," "The Alphabet Song" and "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" have the same melody. Although most musicians would find nothing extraordinary about this melody, the particular appeal of this tune to those who handclap warrants further exploration.

Another handclap that reveals multiple variations is "Shame:"

SHAME! I don't want to go (1) to Macy's, no more, more,
more.

(2) to Mexico,

(3) to college,

There's a big, fat policeman at the door, door, door.

He pulled me by the collar, made me pay a dollar.

I don't want to go to (Macy's) no more, more, more.

SHAME!

(Steinbach 49)

Analysis of the three variants directs attention to the taboo activity: a policeman at Macy's implies shoplifting; a policeman in relation to Mexico implies illegal drugs (my collection from Marin City); and a policeman at college implies political activism or drugs (Michaels and Whyte, 46). The informants, regardless of the version, are processing information about illegal, anti-social behavior that piques their interest much to the chagrin of authority figures.

Because the documentation of children's games before the seventeenth century was not a customary practice, citing a *terminus ante quem* for the genre is not possible. Although the rhymes of most traditional handclaps in English can be readily traced back to the Great Britain, the rhythmic components may arguably be African. A comment in the Opies' scholarship hints handclaps being reminiscent of early Egyptian culture. They describe "two girls...kneeling...and hand-clapping. They looked like slave girls in an ancient Egyptian frieze. They were clapping to an exotic chant: "Em pom pee diddy vee diddy voskus..." etc. (Opie and Opie, *Lore and Language* 95). Ironically, a friend found a picture—which is not ancient—that utilizes authentic hieroglyphs, and matches this description. I have found glyphs with hands similarly positioned, but in a different context. Further research is needed to verify the scene. Can we establish that handclaps go back to ancient Egypt? A glyph for "a man jumping rope" was found (Budge 44). The Opies report the earliest record of "patty-cake," an adult-initiated game, is 1698 and the earliest record of "Pease, Porridge Hot," a child-to-child game, is 1797. They also state that

fashion for handclapping peaked "late nineteenth century up through the First World War" (*Singing Game* 440-3). This may reflect a trend in collecting as opposed to a popularity of the genre. Aries quotes Heroard, doctor to Louis XIII, who kept detailed records of the Dauphin's development in *Journal sur l'enfance et la jeunesse de Louis XIII*: "He played various games, such as 'I want your place', fiddle-de-dee, hand-clapping, and hide-and-peek with some soldiers" at the age of five or six (65). This would be in 1607, ninety-one years earlier than the Opies' 1698 documentation of "patty-cake." Handclapping of French soldiers needs further research.

The handclapping games are in our field of vision so often that we do not notice them. Some conclusions about the game are faulty. A teacher in Salinas had told me these games were no longer played, but the following week she called back and said the girls had *just started* playing them again. After watching my promotional video *Hand Jive* various viewers will inform me that they are noticing the games frequently in movies, newsreels, on playgrounds, at bus stops and just about wherever kids are waiting around for more than a minute with nothing to do. Some interviewees have tried to apply a seasonal connection to the activity. A Dutch teacher reported that girls play the games mostly in the spring in Utrecht. Newell (132) offers that girls use these games to keep their hands warm on cold winter mornings. My footage from Thailand was shot in mid summer. The season for handclaps can vary as much as the season for falling in love: it happens when the time and conditions are right. Often in collecting, I come across girls who will perform a favorite song, such as "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" shown in my promotional video, using a familiar pattern. They claim to have "created" a new handclap, yet it is unlikely to spread. There must be some extra special appeal to the rhymes and melodies that do travel afar.

To generate interest and funding for producing an informed documentary on this engaging tradition, I have prepared an eight-minute promotional video *Hand Jive*. My desire to film the games started when I was traveling in Ghana in 1998. In Cape Coast, I saw three girls handclapping a pattern that is common in California. The joy of play shows in my photographs from that experience, and encouraged my thought of documenting the genre on video. My next travels took me to Thailand, where two girls started to play a game right in front of me. I had the video camera and taped them. The three of us watched it together on the tiny LCD screen, after which I joined in their game to learn the actions. They smiled as they bowed traditionally when taking their leave. We had a special bond, based on handclaps. An in-depth documentary on the handclapping tradition would open minds and hearts, and would illuminate a delightful aspect of girlhood the world over. On one of his final visits

with her, a friend repeatedly watched my "short" with his mother who was dying of cancer. She commented memorably "Those children. Such joy, and yet so exact"(Wegelin).

Informants consistently remark that handclapping is "fun." It is "pure unadulterated fun" when "pure" is taken to mean "genuine," and "unadulterated" means "without adult interference." It is fun to watch as well. What makes the activity so appealing? The words? rhythm? actions? the concentrated effort? In "Down, Down Baby" they chant "put it all together" and they do.

Handclaps play a viable role during a distinct developmental stage of childhood. Different from jump rope, where the opportunity to demonstrate individual skill is a driving force, handclapping is about the collaborative spirit of the group, for girls who enjoy working together in close harmony. As the Opies state "The songs and actions may change, but the important thing is that childhood continues to sing in the freedom of its own tatterdemalion world" (*Singing Game*, ix).

Appendix 1

Titles of some of the most popular handclaps in English that have appeared in multiple variants in currency over the last hundred years:

Apples on a Stick (Jelly in a Dish)
The Bedbugs and the Cooties (having a ball game)
Bobo Ski Watten Datten
Dr. Knickerbocker
Double, Double, This, This
Down by the Banks of the Hanky Panky
Down, Down Baby
Eeny, Meeny Pepsadeeny
Funny (Pretty) Little Dutch Girl
Lemonade
Long Legged Sailor (Have You Ever, Ever, Ever)
Mama, Mama, Can't You See
Mailman, Mailman (also Policeman, Policeman or Postman, Postman)
(Miss)/(Old) Mary Mack
Miss Sue From Alabama
Miss Susie (Lucy) Had a Steamboat
My Mother is a Baker
My Mother Said
My Mother told me (Rubber Dolly)
My Mother, Your Mother
Pease Porridge Hot
Rockin' Robin
A Sailor Went to Sea, Sea, Sea
Say, Say oh Playmate
Shame
Slide
That's the Way, Uh-huh
Tiny Tim (Miss Lucy had a Baby)
When Billy (Sally) Was One (Cross Down)
When Suzie was a Baby

Appendix 2 Sample archival entry "Mama, Mama, Can't You See"

Handclap, African-American

Informants: Marianna McDevitt, 7 (Spanish/English bilingual)

Jocelyn Inglehart, 7

(African-American, first cousins)

16 Nov 2005

Text:

(Movement pattern #1—performed while singing lyrics)

D D B. A. D D F# (*chanted melody*)

Mama, Mama, can't you see,

(Movement pattern #2—performed with no lyrics)

(Movement pattern #1)

D D B. A. D D A.

What this baby's done to me.

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

Now he stole my MTV.

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

Now I'm watching Barney.

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

Barney got shot by G. I. Joe

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

I'm so glad that Barney's dead

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

Tic-tac-toe, three in a row.

(Movement pattern #2)

(Movement pattern #1)

D D A. G. D D D (*final note*).

Clap until you hands turn red.

(continue clapping 3 beat pattern—first three claps of Movement pattern #2)

Motions

Movement pattern #1

- Each player has her right hand facing down and left hand facing up.
- Fingertips are curled, to clasp other player's opposite hand, in a hooking manner.
- In eight counts:
 1. Each player pushes with right arm and pulls with left arm.
 2. Each player pulls with right arm and pushes with left arm.

Repeat a total of four times.

Movement pattern #2:

- In eight counts, with accents on 1.4.7.
 1. horizontal clap with neighbor(s), right palm facing down and left palm facing up.
 2. vertical clap with neighbor(s), right hand of one player to left hand of other.
 3. clap own hands.
 - 4.5.6. repeat 1.2.3.
 7. clap own hands.
 8. rest

Context:

After a session of Music for Children class at the San Francisco Community music center, Marianna initiated this handclap with her cousin Jocelyn. Marianna had been learning it during recess at school. Several other girls joined in, making the handclap a circle, rather than partner, game.

Analysis:

Television programming geared to children has been prevalent since the 1950s. Commercial products and images have been the everyday fare of the viewing audience. Jingles and characters from mass media often become incorporated in their lyrics of games. Advertisers strive to create catchy jingles. Name recognition leads to sales. Having their product become incorporated into a children's game is an excellent indication of success. There is a strong possibility of a connection between the introduction of the breakfast cereal "Cocoa puffs," in 1959, and the handclap line "Shimmy-shimmy cocoa pop", that gained popularity in the 1960s. "Nabisco" is substituted for "a biscuit" in "I Have a Boyfriend" (Michaels, 46). "Ronald McDonald" appears in other variants of the same handclap while "a biscuit" remains "a biscuit." (Bronner,

American Children's Folklore 65; Bauer, 16). The French "Pepito au Chocolat" was a commercial jingle. In "Mama, Mama, Can't You See" popular commercial characters Barney, an insidiously pink dinosaur, and G. I. Joe have crossed over into folklore. G. I. Joe is a soldier who is in the army to defend our country from enemies. His shooting and killing Barney is a violent act, a taboo topic for children this age. Something taboo is also enticing. Barney becomes the undesirable enemy. The informants are going through the passage from early childhood to school age consciousness. They have outgrown the cute pink dinosaur, and are now interested in boys. For further discussion see Elizabeth Tucker's article, "I Hate You, You Hate Me": Children's Responses to Barney the Dinosaur," *Children's Folklore Review* 22.1 (1999), 25-33, and Donna Lanclos's article, "Wee Chimneys and Bare Burns," *CFR* 22.2 (2000), 40. The "baby" stealing MTV suggests an affectionate baby, or boyfriend. MTV is the television channel that shows popular music videos that are highly charged with sexual imagery, usually disallowed for seven year olds. It seems this boyfriend wants to watch the proscribed videos without his supposed girlfriend. The girl trying to come to terms with male dominance goes to "Mama" who is still available for consolation.

The form of the song, the melodic line of the chant, and the rhythmic interlude closely resemble "Hambone" as presented in *Step it Down* (Jones and Hawes, 34-6). The accent occurring on an upbeat in the clapping pattern is noteworthy to musicians, but the girls are unaware of it. After just having tried to verbally describe this game, I recommend watching the game being played live or on film. In twenty seconds they would understand all of the above.

Appendix 3 Places where Handclaps have been Documented

United States
 Canada
 Mexico
 Caribbean Islands
 England
 Ireland
 Scotland
 Iceland
 The Netherlands
 France
 Spain
 Ghana
 Nigeria
 Cameroon
 Australia
 New Zealand
 Japan
 Korea
 Thailand
 Viet Nam
 China

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