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## [The Black South in Chicago]

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Project worker Garnett L. Eskew

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CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

Negro Lore

FOLKLORE

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[?]

May 26, [?]

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Garnett L. Eskew

ADDRESS 4700 Kenwood Avenue

DATE May 3, 1939

SUBJECT "The Black South in Chicago"

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NAME OF INFORMANT George Sims (6034 S. May St., Chicago. This is in addition to other matters supplied by the same informant two weeks ago)

“Catfish? Who sesso? Hit's the bes' eatin' fish you kin git anywhere. Don't keer where you go. There aint nothin' that tickle your palate like a chunk of channel cat fried crisp. Of co'se de snot cat good. Th' ole mud cat aint bad neither. I have eat pompano and buffalo fish and red snapper and a lot of others. But don't let nobody tell you any different. Catfish is the finest eatin of all.”

“In N'Yowliens when I was a boy I never had to buy no fish. All we had ter do wuz to take a pole and string and hook and go down sit on de steamboat wharf. Sit there and doze and haul 'em in. Den if we git tired of catfish we could have crabs. The by-yo (bayou) flows right through de town. Pay a dime fer a little dip-net and some bacon scarps, and go sit in shade of de oak trees and pull em in! De old crabs, dey catch hold th' bait and hol' it wid dey claws til you pulls it to the top of de water. Den you dip in and lift him out. Crab meat good eatin too.”

“Nother dish I likes a lot dat we useter have in N'Yawliens is Jam-lye (Note: jambalaya - a Creole dish invented by the Spaniards and improved by the French). My wife know how ter make hit bettern 2 FORM D CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF anybody I ever see. She take some fish and cut hit up and mix e hit wid cook rice, and season hit up nice and hot. And some times she put in some chop meat or chicken stead er de fish an' fry it brawn in plenty of grease! Sho is tasty eatin!”

“When I wusn't nothin but a little tad, on Sunday, sometimes, we'd come home from Church and eat a big dinner. Den I'd take my bucket and nothin' else but muh bare hands, and walk out ter de little drain canals dat come outer de swamp. Dat's whar we ketch de crawfish. (Crayfish in whut dem creoles call hit). Ketch a whole bucket full and take em home an' muh mammy would make de best Crawfish beast (Note: he means Crayfish

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Bisque ) a man ever pop in his mouf. Dat sho'ly is one fine soup. Haint tasted none since I got up to Chicago.”

“An Gumbo - ! Didn't you never eat no Gumbo? You has! Well, den, you know whut I talking about. Some times muh woman make it wid crabs or swimp; or sometimes wid chicken, and put in de okra, and make it nice an' tasty wid sage and bayleaf and thyme! An' after hit done cook a long while - - man, dey aint no better eaten no whar!”

“Here in Chicawgo? Yessir, I have done foun' a place ter git good fresh fish and de kine er stuff we put in dem Creole foods. Whar at? Over in Jew town on de wes' side.”

“Boss, less quit talking bout dat N'yawleens food. Hit make hongry.”

“You done ask me 'bout steamboat songs. Hit bin zo long ago, an' I done jined de church sense I lef down dar, dat I mos fergit all about Coonjone. But dey wuz one song day we uster sing dat went like dis:

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Sing dis song in de city, Roll dat cotton bale! Nigger always happy When he gits out of jail. Mobile's got de wimmin, Boston got de beans, New Yawk done got flashin' swells, But de nigger like N'yawleens, Cho: Coonjine, baby, won't you coonjine, Coonjine, honey, is you game, Mammy won't lemme coonjine But I coonjine jus' de same!

“Sing hit fer you? Lawd, boss, I aint sung no sich song for forty years. Hit went like dis . . . . . (NOTE: He sang it, but impossible to reproduce it.)

“We useter sing dat song when I was workin' on de Alice B. Miller, runnin' up Yazoo River and sometime when I work on de Saint John, a cotton boat, dat run up Red River.”

“I 'member once we had a mighty hard mate name Sam Cotton who wuz too handly wid de hoe handle. So all de rousters jumped de boat at Vicksburg, and say dey wont work for

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such a mean mate. So de mate 4 and de capn tie up de boat at Vicksburg and come on down ter N'yawlin on de rattler. Den dey look me up, and say:

“George, we want you ter git us a mess er rousters”. So I gits together about twenty er de boys down on de levee and says ter de capn and de mate: “Capn and Capn Sam, dese hyuh boys is willin' ter work on de boat, iff do mate is willin' ter behave hisself.” De capn he laff and say dat gwinter be all right now, dat Sam will watch hisself. So we take de train and git de rousters up ter Vicksburg, git on bode de boat and come on down ter NYleens. De mate (dat is capn Sam) act just a peaceable as a lam'! Eve'thing all right after dat.”