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Bought and sold like cattle and facing lives without hope, slaves in the Old South bolstered their self-esteem with play. Children's games in particular helped to build slaves' sense of community.

life—joyous and tragic. They simulated not only church services and songfests but also funerals and even slave auctions. Athletic contests helped the strong and the swift achieve the status denied them elsewhere (especially when white children competed and lost).

Child's play revealed slaves' strong "sense of community," writes Wiggins. Boxing and wrestling matches were rare; they ran counter to the slaves' "social philosophy" of survival through cooperation. Nor did blacks enjoy games with elimination rules, such as dodge ball, for they evoked the indiscriminate slave sales that tore apart families.

Black children were fond of card games and other forms of gambling, which white children generally shunned. And where slave youths' play was usually informal and improvised, white boys and girls favored games with strict rules. To Wiggins, this suggests that blacks' and whites' notions of work and play differed: Southern slaveholders adhered to the work ethic and regarded play as a frivolity "to be engaged by gentlemen only in the most organized and refined fashion." For slaves, however, survival depended less on skill and effort than on luck. Play was to them one field in which they "could realize a certain degree of dignity" and brighten a harsh existence.

The Politics of Language

"How Wide Is the Language Gap?" by Edith McArthur, in *American Demographics* (May 1981), Circulation Dept., P.O. Box 68, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850.

In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau asked Americans "what language, other than English" was spoken at home when they were children. The question—broad enough to elicit replies regardless of how often or by

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whom a foreign tongue was used—was designed to collect data on ethnicity, not on language proficiency, says McArthur, a Census Bureau statistician. But the answers have provided the numerical guidelines behind recent federal legislation to assist non-English-speaking Americans, with costly results.

Just who is a “non-English speaker”? Is it someone whose “mother tongue” (language spoken in a child’s home) is foreign, whose usual language is foreign, or who speaks no English at all? Depending on the criteria, the count in this country ranges from six million to 28 million (13 percent of the population). The definition used can have a tremendous impact on federal programs. The 1975 amendments to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, for instance, require bilingual ballots in districts where five percent or more of the population speaks a single language other than English and where that group’s election turnout is under 50 percent. The Bilingual Education Act of 1976 requires special help for children from “environments” where English is not the “dominant language.” Both rely on 1970 census data—i.e., on the “mother tongue” criteria.

Yet a special 1976 Census Bureau survey suggests that of the 28 million Americans with a foreign mother tongue, only 6.4 million usually speak it at home (Spanish accounts for one-third, followed by Italian, Chinese, and French). Some 8.6 million use it only as a second language. And only 19 percent of those who speak a foreign language reported problems with English. (Age was clearly a factor; only four percent of children aged four to 13 reported any difficulty.) Living in a household where English is not usually spoken could affect a child’s educational progress, however. Six percent of such children aged eight to 17 were not even enrolled in school, versus only two percent of all children. And 18 percent lagged two or more grades behind their peers, versus only eight percent of all children.

The 1980 census asked several language-related questions, including whether respondents usually spoke English and how well. As a result, McArthur believes, we may finally discover not only how many Americans truly are isolated beyond the language barrier but also where they live, what language they speak, and whether they are more likely to need elementary textbooks or foreign-language brochures on medicare.

Town and Country

“The Public and Private Worlds of City Life” by Claude S. Fischer, in *American Sociological Review* (June 1981), 1722 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

City life puzzles sociologists. Surveys consistently show that city dwellers are less likely to help strangers and are more exposed to conflict and violence than are their country cousins. Yet other research indicates that personal friendships thrive as vigorously in cities as in Podunk and that the pressures of the urban “jungle” do not create disproportionate psychological stress.