The spirituals are, in essence, the religious folk songs created by the African peoples who were enslaved in North America in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Although it is impossible to determine when the songs first appeared, some scholars have conjectured that the most prolific period of composition was the time period beginning in the last half of the eighteenth century and continuing until the end of legalized slavery in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ever since the end of official slavery, the African American community has maintained a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the spirituals tradition, in spite of the unequivocally positive impact of that tradition on the course of African American (and American) history. On the one hand, the post-Civil War world travels of the Fisk Jubilee Singers (followed by a number of other black college touring choirs) brought the unique sounds and messages of the spirituals to the attention of large international audiences. Subsequently, in the first half of the twentieth century, the spirituals became part of the repertoire of such renowned concert artists as Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson. In addition, the spirituals became an integral part of weekly worship services in African American Protestant denominational churches. All these developments reflected a widespread interest in and respect for slave songs, continuing long after the Emancipation Proclamation.

On the other hand, the deeper meanings of the spirituals were often missed, even by appreciative audiences. In addition, there were doubts about the true value of the music. Moreover, there were many who felt
that the spirituals reflected a shameful history that would best be forgotten. As early as 1903, the African American sociologist W. E. B. DuBois noted that the "Negro folksong... has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood." DuBois saw the situation as tragic, since, in his opinion, the spirituals represented "not simply the sole American music, but... the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas."4 DuBois also lamented the failure of many Americans, black and white, to appreciate the depth of meaning and history embodied in the spirituals.

The collective devaluation of the spirituals that DuBois observed has continued on some level throughout the twentieth century. For a long time, this pejorative view was balanced by the considerable respect paid to the spirituals tradition in a large number of community contexts, both within the United States and abroad.5 In recent years, however, the situation has turned more one-sidedly negative. Interest in the spirituals, both in and outside the African American community, may have reached an all-time low.6 Paralleling this trend is a surprisingly widespread lack of knowledge of the historical origins of these songs. For example, the spirituals are often confused with twentieth-century black gospel music. This confusion may stem in part from the strong functional and musical similarities that do in fact exist among the various historical expressions of African American sacred music. Frequently, however, the confusion reveals an ignorance of the historical contiguity of the spirituals and slavery. Among those who do understand correctly that the spirituals originated in slavery, there is often only a surface knowledge of the complex underlying history. In addition, slave songs still evoke feelings of shame and embarrassment.

In a landmark study, John Lovell, Jr., continuing the commentary begun by DuBois seventy years earlier, addressed at great length the ambivalence toward the spirituals that had persisted for several decades. He commented, for example, that those who continue to view the spirituals as "a religious cry of slavish people... are not well acquainted with the slaves who produced them, men and women of considerable self-respect and courage." Furthermore, Lovell noted, even so-called lovers of the spirituals "are not well acquainted with the deep underlying meanings of individual songs, and certainly not familiar with the powerful meanings of a number of songs on the same subject taken together."7 Lovell hoped that his comprehensive study would help to correct such distortions and misunderstandings, and that the spirituals would be restored, once and for all, to their rightfully respected place in the culture.

Several scholars, from a variety of academic disciplines, have added their voices to the DuBois-Lovell legacy, hoping to correct permanently the confusions that have, enigmatically, persisted.8 Nevertheless, Lovell's hope that, finally, the spirituals tradition would be understood and respected on a mass level has yet to be realized. Ingrained misunderstandings die very
slowly. The current chapter therefore offers an opportunity to contribute to a more accurate and complete understanding of this significant part of African American culture.

What follows is a cultural profile of the spirituals within the broader context of their functional relationship with other, historically later, African American music forms. Such a profile serves two purposes: It provides a corrective view of the historical and contemporary functions of the spirituals, and it illuminates core cultural and psychological features of all African American music.

I will weave my discussion around three essential elements of the African (and, later, African American) cultures from which the creators of the spirituals descended. These elements are spirit, community, and music. This structural scheme will provide a framework within which the functional impact of the spirituals, historically and in recent times, can be discussed. In the section on music, I also will attempt to draw attention to the controversial issue of the extent to which the proliferation of "arranged" spirituals has compromised the cultural integrity of the music. At the end of the chapter, I will offer my views on some of the factors that have contributed to the protracted feelings of ambivalence concerning slave songs, especially within the African American community. I believe that an understanding of this issue can help us envision an enhanced role for music as a continuing source of community empowerment, particularly if that empowerment is built, in African fashion, on the shoulders of the ancestors.

SPIRIT

African Americans have always been a deeply spiritual people. This honoring of the spirits is rooted historically in the similarly prominent role of sacred belief systems in virtually all the western and central African tribal cultures from which North American slaves were captured. It is therefore no accident that the first substantial body of music to be created by newly enslaved Africans in North America contained salient spiritual themes. These themes were the products of a syncretistic merging of core African religious beliefs with the distinctively Africanized Christianity that evolved gradually in the North American slave community.

Understanding the African roots of the spirituals helps to dismiss the notion that the music of slavery was first and foremost a reactive music. There is no question that slaves employed music effectively in their attempts to transcend the psychological and spiritual horrors of inhuman bondage. However, this use of music was an improvisational employment of an already essential part of the culture. The spirituals, in other words, were not created solely for the purpose of enduring the suffering imposed by slavery. Rather, these songs were a natural extension of long-established African traditions of music created for worship and spiritual affirmation. Their use
The theology expressed in the spirituals is in many ways a creative blend of the best of African traditional religions and European-American Christianity. A significant piece of the African influence is the integration of spirituality into all aspects of everyday life. Theologian Peter Paris offers one of the best descriptions available of African spirituality: "The 'spirituality' of a people refers to the animating and integrative power that constitutes the principal frame of meaning for individual and collective experiences. Metaphorically, the spirituality of a people is synonymous with the soul of a people: the integrating center of their power and meaning. In contrast with that of some peoples, however, African spirituality is never disembodied but always integrally connected with the dynamic movement of life." 12 Paris's definition underscores the fact that spirituality encompasses a total style and manner of experiencing oneself and the world. Paris also provides a context for understanding the fact that although there are many differences between the religious systems of various African communities, the core features of religion and spirituality among African peoples throughout the diaspora are remarkably similar.13 Typically, the "dynamic movement" of spirituality in African cultures is facilitated by the active presence of a Supreme or High God and a host of lesser spirits, the nature of which are detailed in the tenets of specific tribal religions. But even when the spirits are not named or identified, the personally authentic experience of "soul" is still present. Hence, twentieth-century African Americans are very familiar with "soul" music, which is not specifically religious, in the sense of a clearly defined theology, but definitely spiritual, in terms of the inner experiences generated by the music. The emotional experience one has when listening to the singing of a rhythm and blues song by a singer like Aretha Franklin, for example, is quite similar to what one experiences in listening to her perform gospel music. When Aretha made the switch from gospel to rhythm and blues in the 1960s, she retained the "soul" that has gained her the well-deserved title "Queen of Soul."14 While Aretha is exceptional in her communicative ability as an artist, her tendency to perform rhythm and blues songs out of the same deep spirit that she brings to her sacred repertoire is not at all uncommon. In fact, in the African American experience, the "soul" is difficult to remove, even in so-called secular music. Whatever the music form, be it rhythm and blues, jazz, rap, gospel, spirituals, or blues, black music is consistently "soulful." The "soul" is reflected in the feelings of jubilation, well-being, and centeredness one experiences in making, listening to, or dancing to the music. These experiences signal the presence of a transpersonal spirit, even when that spirit is not named. Such experiences contribute
to a sense of personal integrity that is difficult to put into words, but indisputably real.

Among enslaved Africans in America, the presence of the spirits was not only experienced but the spirits were identified and named as well. The West African shaman Malidoma Some writes that among his people, the Dagara, "the older you get, the more you begin to notice the spirits and ancestors everywhere." Similarly, the elders in North American slave communities were acutely cognizant of the omnipresent spirits in their midst. For example, consider the poetic lyrics of one famous spiritual:

My God is so high, you can't get over Him;
He's so low, you can't get under Him; He's
so wide, you can't get around him.16

These lyrics announce boldly that God is everywhere, that it is impossible to escape the presence and the influence of the divine.

The theology of the spirituals also mirrors the multidimensional Godconcepts of many African religions, in which the will of an omnipotent "High God" is made manifest through the actions of a number of lesser spirits or deities.17 In African religions, the people have much more intimate relationships with the lesser spirits. Typically, the High God is more powerful but also more distant from the people.

Gradually, the African gods were subsumed by the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost) of Christianity. In so doing, the creators of the spirituals formed an especially close relationship with Jesus, the most personally engaging member of the Trinity. In fact, throughout the history of African American Christianity, this experience of Jesus as one's personal friend, neighbor, mother, or father is considerably more pronounced than it is in the more abstract and relatively more intellectualized experience of Jesus in white Christianity.18

The intimate nature of the relationship with Jesus is expressed in countless spirituals. Consider, for example, the lyrics of one song which is still sung in many African American churches:

I want Jesus to walk with me; I
want Jesus to walk with me;
All along my pilgrim journey, I
want Jesus to walk with me.19

The Jesus of this song is one who lives in your home, one who possesses all the attributes of an intimate family member. This Jesus is in fact so loving that anyone who gets to know him will want desperately for others to know him as well. Another well-known spiritual expresses this wish:
Is there anybody here who loves my Jesus? Is there anybody here who loves my Lord? I want to know if you love my Jesus; I want to know if you love my Lord.

These lyrics reveal the far-ranging impact of slave religion. From such a vantage point, one does not believe in Jesus; one knows and experiences him. Moreover, any person who does know Jesus is changed forever, much like the person who is well-loved and cared for by a parent in early childhood. The impact of such love extends far into the future, even after a parent's death, by leaving the affected person with an enduring sense of well-being and personal security.

Of course, the ability of African Americans to bond so strongly to Jesus was facilitated not only by the historical background of African spirituality, but also by a personal identification with the story of the life of Jesus. There were many parallels to the experience of slavery: A child of God, born of humble origins, forced with his parents to flee from oppressors, eventually captured, persecuted, tortured, and killed; there was much that was personally familiar. Most important, the Jesus story provided a reminder that although misunderstood and unappreciated by his captors, Jesus remained forever a child of God. To experience the love of Jesus, therefore, was to have a strong personal protection against external attempts to destroy completely one's sense of personal worth.

The deep sense of spirituality that was present from the beginning of the slave experience and expressed so strongly in slave songs provided a firm basis for the use of music to buttress the self-esteem of Africans in bondage. This use of music was not, as commonly believed, primarily escapist in nature. The creators of the spirituals were much more interested in obtaining their freedom than they were in using their songs to create an imaginary vision of life after death. The true power of the songs was contained in the alternative definitions of the self that they facilitated. Regarded by their
oppressors as chattel, Africans in bondage were able to retain their sense of themselves as whole human beings, as children of God. One of the greatest protest spirituals, for example, exclaims:

I got shoes,
You got shoes,
All God's children got shoes.
When I get to Heaven, gonna put on my shoes, And
walk all over God's Heaven!

This song is not about wishing to die and going to Heaven. Rather, it employs the imagery of Heaven, in the imagination, to construct a different definition of life in the present. It is a statement of the singer's confident knowledge that even though there are no earthly shoes (or other physical comforts) provided to slaves, everyone is worthy of shoes, and everyone is a child of God, despite external definitions to the contrary. In embracing the song and its lyrics, the singer creates a new, here-and-now definition of the self. As the contemporary African American activist Jesse Jackson might say, the singer is proclaiming, in essence, that "I am somebody!" The meaning of this self-proclamation is even clearer in the final lines of each of the song's verses. There is a masked reference to the slavemaster:

Everybody talkin' 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there,
Heaven, Heaven;
Gonna shout all over God's Heaven!23

In other words, things are not as they might appear. The slavemaster, who is always "talkin' 'bout Heaven," may believe that he has been divinely appointed to assume a role of superiority in relationship to his "property." However, in the singer's mind, the hierarchy is reversed, not just in the future, but now. The slaveholder is regarded as a pitifully tragic creature.

This employment of subtle metaphor to effect a psychological reversal of the publicly defined hierarchy of oppression is a device that has been employed repeatedly by African Americans in a variety of cultural forms. With its beginnings in the code of morality embodied in the spirituals, it has become a signature feature of black American culture. For instance, many of the blues songs of the early twentieth century painted graphic images of white people in the victim role. In one song example provided by historian Lawrence Levine, for example, the lyrics evoke a strong identification with the boll weevil, a tiny, weak-appearing creature who nonetheless has the ability to endure a great deal of punishment from its "civilized" environment. In the process, the boll weevil gains the ability to turn the tables by inflicting a great deal of damage. White people become prime victims of the tiny boll weevil's newfound power:
Boll weevil said to the merchant, "Better drink you cold lemonade; When I git thru with you, Gwine drag you out 0' the shade'I have a home! I have a home!" ..

Boll weevil said to the doctor, "Better po' out all them pills; When I get through with the farmer He can't pay no doctor's bills 'I have a home! I have a home'"24

When the boll weevil gets through, it has a home! The white man, on the other hand, is completely bewildered.

The ability to employ poetic imagery to reverse the hierarchy of oppression also provided the foundation for outward acts of resistance, both during slavery and at other times in African American history. During slavery, resistance took a variety of forms: arson, insurrection, murder, escape, calls for African emigration, and numerous other concrete actions by individuals, families, and bands of rebels.25 In the slave community, such acts of resistance were accompanied by the singing of songs in which the brave acts of biblical freedom fighters received top billing. This employment of spirituals as a partner of protest and resistance was a preview of things to come at later points in history, including the use of improvised spirituals as freedom songs during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.26

Clearly, the spirits that inhabited the slave quarters were partners with African American captives in refashioning the intended order of things within the institution of slavery. The action of the spirits was particularly salient in the songs the slaves created. These songs facilitated both a strengthening of the inner will and a collective call to outward resistance. The foundation for the distinctly African American cultural attitude, which Ferdinand Jones has called "challenge" (see "Jazz and the Resilience of African Americans," Chapter 5 in the current volume), was contained in these early African American songs. The attitude of challenge redefines everything-self, community, and society-in distinctly soulful ways.

COMMUNITY

It is impossible to understand the cultural history of the spirituals without recognizing the strong community values of early African Americans. In many ways, this emphasis on family and community relationships is a direct extension of the strong religious orientation we have been discussing. Religious scholar John Mbiti has described the connection in African traditions between religious belief and interpersonal responsibilities: "Just
As God made the first man, as God's man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social man. It is a deeply religious transaction. Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and other people. . . . The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man."27 (Emphasis added.) Furthermore, Mbiti explains, tribal communities in traditional African societies are basically kinship networks: "The kinship system is like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in a given local group. This means that each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else."28

In spite of the devastating emotional impact of tribal and family separations, there is considerable evidence that the tendency to understand and experience oneself in terms of an extended network of kinship relationships remained remarkably intact during slavery.29 The lyrics of most of the spirituals reflect this worldview; nearly everything in the songs is filtered through the conduit of relationships with family and community members. Sometimes those relationships are implied, but frequently they are stated explicitly. One well-known spiritual, for example, describes the personal suffering of slavery through the image of a "motherless child." On one level, the image points to the frequent separation of families during slavery. On another level, the emotional brutality of slavery is portrayed through the metaphor of family separation. Since family relationships were so primary, and since the relationship between a mother and child is central to family functioning, there can be no more powerful image of suffering than an image of a child separated from its mother:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, A
long ways from home.30

Of course, an image of a motherless and homeless child would communicate the reality of suffering in any cultural context. However, the heightened emphasis on kinship in African cultural traditions makes the message even more powerful. There can be no question, therefore, that a situation of extreme personal anguish is being described.31 There are dozens of spirituals in which the image of family separation is less severe but nonetheless highly effective in what it communicates. Consider, for example, the lyrics of one verse of the spiritual "Peter, Go Ring Them Bells":

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
I wonder where my mother has gone, I
wonder where my mother has gone, I
wonder where my mother has gone, I
heard from Heaven today.32

The lyrics of this song, like most spirituals, can be interpreted on multiple levels. One likely meaning is the mixed feelings of jubilation and sadness one might experience in getting word about the successful arrival in Africa of a family member during the period of African repatriation. One would be happy to have "heard from Heaven" (Africa, in this case), but also saddened by the prospect of prolonged separation from loved ones.33

The employment of images of family separation in the spirituals not only highlights the painfully frequent occurrence of family disruption on the auction block, but also the continued emotional attachment to family members in spite of such disruptions. Moreover, in the early African American experience, the concept of kinship was extended beyond the boundaries of strict blood relationships to include functional relationships with community members to whom one was not biologically related. Terms like "brother" and "sister," therefore, convey the presence of feelings of intimacy attached to relationships with members of one's own community, regardless of blood ties. This is a cultural tradition that remains active today.

Some spirituals employ references to "brother" and "sister" for the purpose of calling attention to violations in the expected code of loyalty and respect among members of the slave community. In such songs of accountability34 violators are often chastised with an implied challenge to correct their wayward ways and return to the fold. The call-and-response lyrics of the spiritual "Scandalize My Name" illustrate this kind of message:

I met my brother (sister, preacher, etc.) the other day,
Gave him my right hand;
But as soon as ever my back was turned,
He took and scandalize' my name!

You call that a brother?  
No, no.
You call that a brother?  
No, no.
You call that a brother?  
No, no!
Scandalize' my name!5

Implied in the message of the song is the notion that the violator can regain the privilege of being called "brother" if he abandons his scandalous be
havior. But whether that choice is made or not, the community code (honor your brother, your sister, your mother, your preacher, and so forth) is clear.

The ethic of community connectedness is particularly evident in the large number of slave songs that employ the designations "Sister" and "Brother" to refer to biblical figures. In some of the verses of "Peter Go Ring Them Bells," for example, there are successive references to biblical figures: "I wonder where Sister Mary is gone; I wonder where Brother Moses is gone; I wonder where Sister Martha is gone; I wonder where Brother Daniel is gone." This way of identifying characters from the Bible makes clear the strong psychological identifications with the stories of those biblical characters. With the simple change to "Sister Mary," the mother of Jesus Christ is transformed into a member of the slave community. Like any mother in that community, her pain and suffering in relation to the hardships faced by her child come alive in ways that are not possible when she is regarded simply as "Mary." There are similar patterns in the stories of Sister Martha, Brother Daniel, and Brother Moses; the stories all take on new life when they are told in such personally intimate ways.

Personalization of Bible stories illustrates another significant cultural value of the early African American community: the honoring of ancestors. In African traditions, ancestors are not simply dead relatives; they remain present in the community in the form of spirits who can be consulted for advice, guidance, and support. Cut off from the specific memory of tribal ancestors, Africans in bondage in North America created, in effect, ancestral equivalents. Moses, for example, was not simply a figure from the Bible; he functioned as an ancestor. The story of the deliverance of his people out of bondage became an important source of inspiration for the freedom struggles of African peoples in slavery. Moreover, the spirit of Moses was ever present to provide support for those struggles. This was also true of other Old Testament heroes; they were regarded in some respects as ancestral freedom fighters whose stories were cherished by African American slaves who were struggling to find effective protest and resistance strategies.

In many ways, the relationship of the slave community to the stories of the Bible created a kind of timeless experience where past, present, and future were all part of one reality. Historian Lawrence Levine has argued that spirituals based on Old Testament stories were particularly important in this regard:

It is important that Daniel and David and Joshua and Jonah and Moses and Noah, all of whom fill the lines of the spirituals, were delivered in this world and delivered in ways which struck the imagination of the slaves. Over and over their songs dwelled upon the spectacle of the Red Sea opening to allow the Hebrew slaves [to] pass before inundating the mighty armies of the Pharaoh. They lingered delightedly upon the image of little David humbling the great Goliath with a stone.
These songs state as clearly as anything can the manner in which the sacred world of the slaves was able to fuse the precedents of the past, the conditions of the present, and the promise of the future into one connected reality.38 (emphasis added)

The "connected reality" that Levine describes was also a source of support and inspiration for the people who emerged as leaders in the ongoing fight against slavery. From this perspective it is easy to understand why Harriet Tubman, one of the most effective "conductors" of the Underground Railroad (the informal network that assisted slaves in escaping into the Northern states and Canada), was often called "Moses."39 A spiritual like "Go Down, Moses," in this context, acquires added meaning:

Go Down, Moses,
Way Down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh,
To let my people go!40

Similarly, the stories of Moses, Joshua, Daniel and other figures of the Old Testament were reembodied in the personhood of anti-slavery activists Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and numerous others. In this respect, the dozens of spirituals that reference Old Testament figures can be understood on a variety of levels.41 At all levels, however, these songs served to reinforce community solidarity in the slave quarters in spite of external forces that were intended to break down any semblance of humanity.

Relationships among slaves were more intact than might be expected. Moreover, recent research by Civil War historians has confirmed the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation finally signed by Abraham Lincoln was a direct result of persistent work on the part of countless members of the slave community who repeatedly made it clear that they were determined to be free.42 The unique sensibilities that helped African Americans to survive 250 years of bondage also made it possible for them to be major players in shaping the American dream of freedom and unlimited opportunity. In fact, as social critic Albert Murray has argued, early African Americans were at the very center of the process of extending the contours of that dream, despite their systematic exclusion from political power.43

MUSIC

In the slave community, music was far more than a diversionary experience; it was an integral, necessary part of community life.44 The influence of music was so pervasive that it almost eludes description. Historian Lawrence Levine has perhaps come closest to capturing the essence of slave
music. In describing the task of some historians (or other scholars) who are unfamiliar with this feature of black culture, he observes that "the study of slave songs forces the historian to move out of his own culture, in which music plays a peripheral role, and offers him the opportunity to understand the ways in which black slaves were able to perpetuate much of the centrality and functional importance that music had for their African ancestors. . . . Without a specific understanding of the content and meaning of slave song, there can be no full comprehension of the effects of slavery upon the slave or the meaning of the society from which slaves emerged at emancipation."45

Levine's statement provides an apt description of the role of music as it evolved among African peoples in North America. His comments apply not only to slave songs, but to later forms of African American music as well. It is instructive, for example, to note how ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby describes contemporary black American music: "Music is integral to all aspects of black community life. It serves many functions and is performed by individuals and groups in both formal and informal settings. The fundamental concept that governs music performance in African and African-derived cultures is that music-making is a participatory group activity that serves to unite black people into a cohesive group for a common purpose. This use of music in African-American communities continues a tradition found in African societies."46

Maultsby's comments are strikingly similar to those made by Levine about the role and functions of slave songs. While the intensity of its impact has been tempered somewhat as time has passed, it is clear that black music has continued to have substantial functional significance in contemporary black American life.

As Maultsby indicates, the functions of African American music (including, especially, the creation of group solidarity) are similar to the functions served by music throughout the African diaspora.47 However, it is also true that the protracted experience of oppression in North America has offered a uniquely American set of challenges. Life difficulties associated with the impact of racism and poverty, for example, have been salient parts of the black American experience. As we have already discussed, black American music confronts such troubles head-on, paradoxically yielding an entirely different set of self-references than might otherwise be expected from a community of would-be victims. Pain and joy, in other words, become two sides of a single process.

In the spirituals, this two-sided process of pain and joy is always present. "I'm troubled in mind," one traditional song exclaims; "if Jesus don't help me, I surely will die!" But Jesus, as we have seen, is surely close at hand, so the singer's plea is almost certainly heard: "Nobody know the trouble I see." (but) "Glory, Hallelu!" And as noted earlier, there is no greater suffering possible than the suffering which is described metaphorically by the
spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Even here, however, there is another side to the story. Implied, even if not stated, is that "sometimes I do not feel like a motherless child; sometimes I feel like a child of God!" By confronting one's pain directly, one gains access to deeper, uncontaminated human reserves, gaining in the process renewed strength, renewed hope, and renewed humanity.

Later forms of black American music have continued this same paradoxical coupling of pain and triumph. For example, as theologian James Cone has noted, the blues tradition is a direct beneficiary of the spirit-based transformational energy contained in the spirituals. In this context, the comments of writer Ralph Ellison are especially revealing: "The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a neartragic 'lyricism'". Using the imagery of the blues to explain the emotional power of Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, Ellison continues: "like a blues sung by such an artist as Bessie Smith, its lyrical prose evokes the paradoxical, almost surreal image of a black boy singing lustily as he probes his own grievous wound. . . . Their [the blues'] attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit."

Ellison's comments reflect his understanding that the blues tradition (or one might say the "black music tradition") is inextricably interwoven into the fabric of African American cultural life. The ability of black Americans to dance, laugh, and sing soulfully (regardless of life circumstances) is a transformational by-product of a deeply ingrained lyrical consciousness, which persistently encounters the spirits (named or unnamed) at the center of life.

**ELEMrnNTSOFTHESPllUTUALSASARTFORM**

While the source of the psychological power of African American music is intangible ("it's just a feeling," some might say), it is important to delineate at least some of the specific elements that mark it as a unique art form. The spirituals are a good starting place, for much of what is now generally true of all black American music had its beginnings in the spirituals.

We have already discussed the religious nature of the spirituals, their community-galvanizing function, and the psychologically effective impact of many of the lyrics. In addition to these significant features of the spirituals, there are several specifically musical elements that contribute to their emotionally and spiritually communicative power. While a detailed technical analysis of the musical characteristics of the spirituals is beyond the scope of this chapter/a it is important to comment on some of these musical elements.

One of the most important elements is rhythm. In virtually all African
societies, the drum was employed as the principal musical instrument. The rhythmic drive of the drum, considered a sacred instrument in most African societies, was thought to facilitate communication between the people and the spirits. Although the use of drums by African captives in North American slavery was prohibited, it was impossible to eradicate the strong impulse to produce rhythmically centered music. In fact, as the musicologist Jon Michael Spencer points out, "rhythm, not the drum, was the theological imperative in African religions." It makes perfect sense, therefore, that enslaved Africans found many suitable substitutes for the forbidden drum. These included various improvised instruments, such as kitchen spoons, cans, pots and pans, and whatever else was at hand. Perhaps the most effective instrument of all—the body—was almost always used. Spencer observes that "their sacred music was embellished percussively by the bodily rhythms of hand-clapping, foot-stomping, body-slapping, and ringshouting. Since response to rhythmic stimuli is instinctive and as certain as the physical reflexes, these bodily modes of percussive response to the rhythms in black music are intrinsic and immediate, for the bodily instrument is always at hand."

To a significant extent, the specific context for such rhythmically oriented music making was the ring-shout, a dancing and singing ritual in which participants moved around a circle in a counterclockwise direction. This ritual was derived from similar ceremonies in western and central Africa. The ring-shout was conducted in secret night meetings that often lasted well into the morning hours. The spirituals chosen for group singing in the ring-shout were frequently those with repetitively rhythmic verses. Historian Sterling Stuckey has described the effectiveness of the ring-shout in strengthening community bonds, particularly in circumstances where family separations were common: "The repetition of stanzas as the dancers circled around with ever greater acceleration reinforced and deepened the spirit of familial attachment, drawing within the ancestral orbit slaves who may not have known either a father or a mother, their involvement being an unbroken unity of the community. Familial feeling in the broad sense of clan and in the personal sense of one's own parents was a dominant, irresistible theme of slave consciousness."

Stuckey's description of the ring-shout also helps draw attention to one other musical element that was prominent in the spirituals: the repetitive use of familiar verses. By employing words that were simple and familiar, and therefore easily conducive to communal singing, the spirituals helped ensure the creation of community rituals that were accessible to virtually everyone in a particular slave community. In so doing, they created a powerful medium of psychological transformation: group singing. In an oral culture, the practice of singing in group settings is employed to communicate, to teach values, and to facilitate contact between the community and the spirits.

Historian, singer, and social activist Bernice Johnson Reagon has argued
that singing in the African American tradition is also effective because of the emotional and physiological changes that accompany the production of sound in the body. In one of the many congregational singing workshops she has conducted, she had this to say about the reason that the singing in black congregational settings is so important:

Songs are a way to get to singing, though singing is what you're aiming for. And the singing is running sound through your body. You cannot sing a song and not change your condition. . . . I am talking about a culture that thinks it is important to exercise this part of your being. The part of your being that is tampered with when you run this sound through your body is a part of you that our culture thinks should be developed and cultivated, that you should be familiar with, that you should be able to get to as often as possible, and that if it is not developed, you are underdeveloped as a human being! If you go through your life and you don't meet this part of yourself, somehow the culture has failed you. 57

Reagon's comments reflect her belief that independent of the other unique elements of the spirituals, singing in and of itself (especially in a group context, where singing is accompanied by body movement) is effective. She views the spirituals as important because they are part of a shared tradition that makes it possible for people to sing together without having to learn new songs or new words. From this perspective, it is ultimately the singing itself that is most important. There is much to be said for this point of view; this is a frame of reference that is reflected in the largely oral character of African American culture. It also helps explain why even in exclusively instrumental music making, as is often the case in jazz, imitation of the human voice is frequently a strong point of emphasis.

Many other cultures have discovered the spiritual and emotional power of singing and the even greater power that results from group singing. For example, Patricia Lawrence, a performing artist raised in the white American Baptist gospel song tradition, could easily be referring to black music when she writes that (white) gospel music is participation music. It is going to stir up every cell in your body. Every ache in your heart. Every longing in your soul. It sends its laser beam deep into every corner of your being and unsticks the old junk hiding there. . . . So what is the release into energy and joy? The release is movement plus singing. Singing and swaying and clapping our hands, we draw what is stirred-up into our breath and sing it out on a wave of vibration and joyful expression. As energy 61ls our being we bring Spirit into our bodies and into the room. As the room 61ls with this energy, we open to each other. 58

Lawrence may be unaware of the extent to which the evolution of music in white Southern churches was likely influenced by the tradition of music making among the slaves and servants with whom white Southerners have
always had close contact. Nevertheless, her passionate exhortation underscores the human functions served by participatory singing. As Lawrence points out, most indigenous cultures are familiar with the power of communal singing: "When we look to the remaining indigenous cultures on earth, or any of the writings and stories of old, we find singing to be the single most consistent element in any gathering, be it ceremony, ritual, or celebration. This is not insignificant. It is impossible to overstate the importance of singing in these contexts. Thus, in their emphasis on collective singing, members of the slave community discovered one of the most effective psychological tools available to human beings anywhere.

One other musical element contributing to the power of the spirituals was the inclusion of songs that, because they were created out of any experience of deep suffering, assumed a kind of archetypal character that made (makes) them particularly powerful in their emotional and spiritual impact. Such power came not only from the symbolic or poetic poignancy of lyrics, but from inspired melodies as well.

The power that is attributable to melody alone is not usually considered in sociological and psychological discussions of the spirituals, which typically focus almost exclusively on the poetry or lyrics. However, while there is much need for research into the contributing factors, experience teaches us that there are certain melodies that have the ability to reach us at a very deep emotional level. As such, they are timeless. In the European classical tradition, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" would be one example of such a melody. It is strikingly simple yet intensely powerful in its emotional impact.

Of course, in the spirituals, we normally hear (or sing) both lyrics and melodies together, making it impossible to sort out the impact of melodies versus lyrics. This is as it should be; it is the combination of inspired poetry and inspired music (including both melody and rhythm) that makes most spirituals so effective. However, one experiential way to sort out the specific impact of a melody is first to try to speak the lyrics alone, and then sing the song with both lyrics and melody together. For example, one might experiment with a well-known spiritual like "Were You There?"

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble! Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they pierced him in the side? Were you there when the sun refused to shine? Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?62

Most people will certainly be deeply affected by the poetic imagery of these lyrics. The words engage us at an intensely personal level; they place
us right at the scene of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In addition, lines like 
"Were you there when the sun refused to shine?" communicate more information 
and emotion than an entire treatise on the social meaning of the crucifixion. In 
addition, it is clear from the lyrics that there is a close personal identification with 
the suffering of Jesus; it matches closely the suffering of many slaves. Despite 
such poignancy, however, most people will also find their understanding of this 
song deepened considerably when they sing it, or even when they hear it sung by 
someone else. The melody line, like the poetry, is simple and repetitious. Yet, it 
is strikingly effective in its impact on us personally. Not only does it 
communicate something of the slave's relationship to the crucifixion of Jesus, but 
also, like many other spirituals, it serves as a metaphor for suffering and as a 
vehicle for transcending the otherwise immutable impact of suffering. Both the 
lyrics and the music contribute to such an experience. One could say the same of 
later forms of black American music. The prolonged experience of oppression in 
America has contributed the same kind of power to the blues, go-pel, and rap, for 
example. In all of these seemingly varied black art forms, music and lyrics 
combine to produce the intended emotional impact.

There are many other musical elements that contribute to the effectiveness of 
the spirituals in their original form. These include the extensive use of 
improvisation, the emphasis on a call-and-response structure, the effective 
alternation of major and minor keys, the inclusion of "blue notes," and the 
emphasis on free expression of emotion through music. As Portia Maultsby 
points out, most of these elements have become distinguishing features of all 
African American music.

THE "ARRANGED" SPIRITUAL: THE IMPACT OF 
ASSIMILATION

One issue that arises in any discussion of African American music is the 
tension between the influence of traditional African versus European cultural 
influences. At what point in the evolution of European influences does the music 
 cease being authentically black? This is a difficult, emotionally laden question 
with no easy answer. Thus Tilford Brooks, in his survey of "America's black 
musical heritage," makes it clear that he believes that a valid answer to such a 
question is nearly impossible.

There are those who are of the opinion that music written by Blacks in the European 
tradition is simply an imitation of the music of White composers, that Black music must 
be restricted to those musical forms that are Black in origin. There are others who contend 
that the Black musician who writes in the European tradition brings to that music a set of 
unique experiences that are manifested in this music; that regardless of the tradition in 
which the music is written, it is Black music providing it was written by a Black person 
who has lived the Black experience; and
that even though it may not be written in one of the traditional Black music forms, this music is intuitively Black because of the cultural environment in which it was created.

There will be no attempt in this book to define Black music other than in its simplest meaning, . . . music that is indigenous to Blacks or composed by Blacks. Ideological questions as to what music is Black and what is not will not be considered here.66

Similarly, Eileen Southern, in her classic text on black American music history, takes essentially the same approach. By titling her book *The Music of Black Americans*, she avoids any attempt to outline any defining characteristics of African American music. She simply chronicles the history of music created by black Americans.

While it is tempting to follow the lead of scholars like Brooks and Southern, such a stance would avoid addressing some of the controversy surrounding the spirituals, where the question of cultural authenticity has been raised frequently. For example, ethnomusicologist John Storm Roberts voices a fairly typical view of the disjuncture between the original religious and musical experiences of slaves and the polished spirituals performed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and other black artists trained in the European classical tradition. "The Fisk Jubilee Singers. . . appear not to have presented black religious music as it really was. Something of the style of the Fisk Jubilee Singers can be heard on recordings of later versions of the group. . . . The sound of these. . . make it obvious that the group's repertoire represented an art re-creation in a line that continued through the Eurocentric concert performances of Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson music that had little to do with the worship of the black Christians who originated the spirituals. "67

There is no question that Roberts is correct from a technical, musicological standpoint. The style of singing that was prevalent in the slave community was markedly different from most concert-based renderings of slave songs, including but not limited to singers trained in the European classical tradition. Of course, since there are no recordings of slaves singing spirituals, we will never know precisely how the spirituals actually sounded in their original forms. We do, however, have a record of the comments of observers. For example, Lucy McKim Garrison, one of the editors of the first notated collection of spirituals, which was published in 1867, had this to say about the singing of spirituals by slaves: "It is difficult to express the entire character of these Negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs. The odd turns made in the throat and the curious rhythmic effect produced by single voices chiming in at different irregular intervals seem almost as impossible to place on the score as the singing of birds or the tones of an aeolian harp. "68

As Garrison indicates, attempts to notate what was up to that point a
purely oral tradition were difficult at best. The use of western musical conventions in published collections of spirituals, therefore, resulted in an early and very significant alteration in the songs themselves.

One can gain some appreciation of original performance styles by listening to recordings of spirituals as they are sung by the residents of the sea islands off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, where African and early African American cultural retentions have remained potent. In listening to such recordings, one gains increased appreciation for Lucy McKim Garrison's comments. The free improvisational style of group singing, which is evident on these recordings, is dramatically different from the polished melodies and harmonies of the spirituals as they are typically performed today by individual artists, ensembles, or church and community choirs. Undoubtedly, much has changed since the songs first appeared.

In addition to the effect of musical notation, the spirituals were changed substantially when they evolved from the spontaneous call-and-response music of field laborers to the concert repertoire of performers who sang to rather than with their audiences. Still, there was nothing inherently less black about any of these changes. Other forms of distinctly black music, including the blues, also evolved into performance rather than folk music. Moreover, all music evolves over time. Not only do social conditions change, but cultural preferences and styles change as well. What was noteworthy about the spirituals, however, was the fact that outside of black church settings, the most influential bearers of the spirituals tradition after the turn of the (twentieth) century were African American performers and composers who were trained in the European classical music tradition. In addition to classically trained black college choirs, the spirituals were performed in concert by such singers as Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson. The style of such performances was dictated by the so-called arranged spirituals of such noted African American composers as H. T. Burleigh, Edward Boatner, Nathaniel Dett, William Levi Dawson, and Hall Johnson. These compositions were essentially the words and melodies of slave spirituals arranged musically in a form resembling the European art song.

Historian Michael Harris has described another change that occurred in the years starting around 1915 and continued through the late 1920s and early 1930s. Many blacks who had migrated from the rural South to the urban cities of the industrial North established memberships in black churches in their new communities. The move by these rural blacks in an attempt to better their economic conditions was accompanied by a conscious push on the part of church leaders to encourage their congregations to leave their past, including black church songs, behind. In most of the large black Baptist churches in Chicago, for example, music directors were under clear instructions from their pastors to establish music programs that featured European classical works, the standard Bach, Beethoven, and
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Brahms. In these settings, traditional styles of black worship, including shouting, witnessing, and improvisational singing, were discouraged. The singing of spirituals, at least in their traditional improvisational forms, was out of the question. However, some music directors attempted to address the hunger of churchgoers for traditional black music by making available their own arranged spirituals for performance by choirs as anthems. One of the values reflected in this move was the idea that the spirituals would be more "developed" (that is, closer to a European aesthetic standard) if performed in the art song genre. John Wesley Work, one of the early directors of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, was a strong adherent of this point of view: "In truth, the general adaptability of this music to a high degree of development is its hope of gaining artistic recognition. It deserves to be put into a finished form; it lends itself admirably to such a purpose; and those who would keep it as it was first reduced to writing, in their mistaken zeal would doom it to stagnation and to the contempt of highly musical people."

Harris argues that the emergence of gospel music was largely a result of attitudes like this. Gospel music was a blues-influenced genre that satisfied the needs of urban churchgoers to have more identifiable black music at the center of their worship services. Former blues musician Thomas Dorsey was one of the first to redirect black church music in this new, "gospel blues" direction. Edward Boatner, who was music director of Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church in the early 1930s and one of the most prominent composers of arranged spirituals, was vehemently opposed to the decision to include Dorsey and his music in Sunday morning worship services. In a 1977 interview, Boatner reaffirmed his disdain for Dorsey's work.

At that time I never knew what a gospel choir was. But I knew that when I heard him play the piano, I knew what was happening. He was sitting in the church one day and he was playing a gospel hymn or song for some lady who was sitting there. And it was nothing but jazz. You can look at any of them today, any of the gospel songs. They have that same jazz type of form. . . . I felt it was degrading. How can something that's jazzy give a religious feeling? If you're in a club downtown, a nightclub, that's all right. That's where it belongs. But how can you associate that with God's word? It's a desecration. The only people who think it isn't a desecration are the people who haven't had any training, any musical training-people who haven't heard fine anthems, cantatas, oratorios.

The "training" Boatner refers to, of course, is training that is influenced by European conceptions of what "fine" music is. Given these beliefs, what is one to make of what Harris calls the "denatured" spirituals of Boatner, Work, or other composers of this persuasion? It is these "denatured" versions of spirituals that have been performed by black college choirs as well as concert singers from the day of Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson to
such current stars as Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle. Should we conclude that spirituals performed in this concert tradition have evolved to the point of being no longer recognizable as black music?

One's understanding of this issue is determined largely by the angle chosen to view it. From one point of view, the abhorrent comments of composers like Boatner and Work are enough reason to conclude that the music they created is outside the boundaries of the black American music tradition. On the other hand, their comments aside, one must ask the question why they went to such great lengths to compose dozens of arrangements of slave songs. The argument that they were simply trying to appease church members, or that they were attempting to rehabilitate what they perceived as sick music, is unconvincing. If they truly believed that European music was the sole standard of excellence, they would have concentrated most of their time arranging and performing European music and educating otherwise uninformed laypersons in the art of appreciating this "fine" music. However, composers like Burleigh, Dett, Work, and Boatner spent a substantial part of their professional careers creating arrangements of slave songs.

It is also true that many of the singers of arranged spirituals performed these songs out of a strong emotional identification with black music traditions, including the music of slavery. Paul Robeson, whose father had been a slave, used the arrangements of H. T. Burleigh when he performed spirituals. He also was known for his pride in black cultural traditions, and the spirituals in particular. In his book *Here I Stand*, his feelings about the spirituals are crystal clear: "Yes, I heard my people singing!-in the glow of parlor coal stove and on summer porches sweet with lilac air, from choir loft and Sunday morning pews-and my soul was filled with their harmonies."

Similarly, Roland Hayes, who started his career attempting to compete with white singers of European classical music, was very definite in his later years about the strong emotional connection he felt to traditional African American culture and music: "I am embarrassed to recall that in my preoccupation with the European composers, and with learning French and German, I had become neglectful of Afro-American music. . . . I was unconsciously putting myself into competition with white singers, whose spotlight I wanted to share. I had yet not received the revelation which was presently to give my ambition its native direction. . . . It remained for me to learn, humbly at first, and then with mounting confidence, that my way to artistry was a Negro way."

More recently, opera singer Florence Quivar, in the liner notes to her recording of spirituals, *Ride on King Jesus*, offered her own testimony: "I've grown up in a world of music all my life, and I've been truly blessed to have been able to sing on so many great operatic and concert stages throughout the world. But nothing has given me as much joy as working
on this recording of Negro spirituals. They are a part of my beginnings. Of my own roots. Of family. Of friends. Of an American Dream."

In this same vein, for the past several years, scores of classically trained singers have assembled on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in church venues in Harlem, New York. The purpose of their annual gathering is a vigil concert honoring Dr. King, consisting entirely of spirituals. The program, which is attended every year by a standing-room-only interracial audience, is hosted by Francois Clemmons, founder and director of the American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation and the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble. The concert typically begins in the early evening and extends into the early morning hours, with singer after singer performing spirituals, many of them using the arrangements of Burleigh, Boatner, Dett, and Work. Each year the church sanctuary is filled with palpable emotional energy as the singing binds the audience and performers together in the best possible honoring of the spirit of the late Dr. King. The vigil also provides a reminder of the transformed spirituals that became the freedom songs of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s that Dr. King led.

All of these illustrations have bearing on the complicated issues of what music can be regarded as authentically black. From one perspective, which I believe is the most accurate, there is a robustness in the black music tradition that refuses to die, even in the face of considerable attempts at premeditated murder. Even when the spirituals have been concertized, smoothed out, refined, or "denatured," the soul remains. There is something about the power of the original melodies and lyrics that continues to exert its influence, even in the face of multiple transformations in form and style. As the annual vigil concerts in New York illustrate, even concertized spirituals can serve the group-galvanizing functions of the original call-and-response slave songs. Moreover, even in the face of a conscious disdain expressed by a composer like Boatner with respect to traditional black music traditions, Boatner and others of his persuasion managed to produce music whose "soul" has been honored by several generations of singers with strong emotional and spiritual ties to their African American roots. These facts would all suggest that the arranged spiritual is indeed a continuation of the black music tradition.

THE FUTURE

This chapter began with a reference to the ambivalence toward the spirituals that has been evident in the African American community since the end of slavery. Much of the ambivalence, I believe, has stemmed from the misdirected conception that the horrors of 250 years of slavery can best be dealt with by disconnecting ourselves emotionally from any identification with that period in our history. Beyond that, we also have allowed ourselves to believe, somehow, that we should be ashamed of the cultural
heritage that is associated with our victimization. This blaming-the-victim (us) stance is obviously self-defeating. Moreover, as we have seen, the tradition of the spirituals, with the history it embodies, is a robust tradition that cannot die, even if we would wish it otherwise. It is also the foundation for what can now be regarded as the African American music tradition, broadly conceived. The use of the spirituals as a conduit for communion with the spirits, with one another, and with our best selves is the raw material out of which much of African American culture has been built.

The African American community will certainly be best off if we can embrace rather than avoid the memories of our painful past. This is the only way for us, and for the nation at large, to heal. There are some signs that this reality is beginning to be recognized in black communities nationwide. Ceremonies held in remembrance of the "Maafa" (Kiswahili for "unspeakable horror") are now becoming commonplace. There are also increasing numbers of people who are using the story of our people's successful triumph over slavery as an inspiration to face mounting contemporary problems like drug abuse and gang violence. As this movement takes hold, it is just a matter of time before people make the conscious connection between the experience of slavery and the music created as an aid in the fight to end slavery.

It is encouraging to see some recent signs of resurgence of interest in the spirituals. For example, in the last few years, the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble has conducted many successful tours, performing all over the world. When Francois Clemmons and Louis Smart founded the Ensemble in 1986, there were many people who predicted that the group could not survive if it insisted on performing spirituals exclusively. This has not proved to be the case. After an initial period of struggling, the ensemble is now flourishing. In addition to the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, the female professional vocal group New Arts Six, based in Dallas, Texas, has also taken on the mission of performing and preserving the cultural heritage of the spirituals. Their work has also been well received.

Recently, there have been some unique recordings released that are particularly noteworthy. Cynthia Willson-Felder, another Dallas-based performer, has released a recording, New Songs of Zion, which presents spirituals performed in gospel style, thereby making the music more accessible to contemporary generations. In a somewhat different vein, Watch and Pray, a recording that includes performances by several artists in honor of the work of heretofore little recognized African American women composers, has also been released recently. Included on the album are several arrangements of spirituals. In addition, jazz artists Charlie Hayden and Hank Jones have released an innovative and stunningly beautiful album of spirituals, hymns, and folk songs illustrating the way in which black music forms overlap and interact. This jazz-based recording includes some of the most poignant interpretations of the spirituals available today.
Paralleling these kinds of developments by performing artists, there are some contemporary African American churches that continue to recognize the importance of including old and new songs in a creative and everchanging blend of community-empowering, spirit-enhancing music. This tradition is honored by Bernice Johnson Reagon's compilation of songs from the congregational singing tradition, complemented by collections of concert spirituals, community gospel and work by pioneering African American gospel composers, demonstrating the interconnection of all forms of African American sacred music. These recordings are a follow-up to her successful twenty-six-hour series on black sacred music, which was aired for the first time in 1994 on National Public Radio.

All of these examples illustrate many of the changes now occurring that point to the real possibility of a significant revival of interest in the spirituals. My experience the last several years conducting lecture-concert programs on the spirituals, in cities throughout the United States, has provided me with a firsthand appreciation for the possibility of such a revival. I have been encouraged particularly by the consistently enthusiastic interest in the history, cultural legacy, and deeper meanings of the spirituals tradition. My experience has also reaffirmed my belief that African American culture thrives when all of its historic music forms are honored, preserved, and reworked. This is because all African-derived cultures are at their best when the wisdom and stories of the ancestors are remembered and respected. The spirituals are an essential piece of that ancestral legacy.

NOTES

5. See note 3 above.
6. Not only is there lack of knowledge of the cultural origins of the spirituals, but there is a waning familiarity with the songs themselves. Concert musicians who perform the spirituals frequently remark among themselves of their dismay at the fact that awareness of the lyrics and melodies of even the most famous spirituals is surprisingly low in contemporary African American communities. In formal surveys I conducted after some of my own lecture-concert performances in 1991 and
1992, I found a strikingly clear pattern. When I asked people to indicate which songs they heard in the concerts were "very familiar," "somewhat familiar," or "not familiar at all," people older than forty years of age tended to indicate "very familiar" or "somewhat familiar" for at least half the songs. People younger than forty tended to indicate "not familiar at all" for most of the songs, including such previously well-known spirituals as "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." While more comprehensive and systematic research is needed, there is no question that knowledge of the spirituals tradition has declined dramatically in recent years.


13. In addition to the discussion of African religion and spirituality throughout the diaspora provided by Paris, see Mbii, *African Religions and Philosophy* for a similar discussion of the similarities and variations throughout the African continent.
14. As an instructive exercise, the reader is encouraged to compare any of Aretha's many rhythm and blues recordings with the communicative and expressive style she employs in her gospel album *Amazing Grace* (New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1972; reissued as Compact Disk No. 2-906-2).


16. For a transcription of the verses and melody of this song as it has been passed down in the culture, see *Songs of Zion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1982), Selection No. 105.


19. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 95.


23. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 95.

24. See Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, pp. 240-241, for his discussion of this traditional song.


30. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 83.
31. See Jones, *Wade in the Water*, pp. 18-38, for discussion of images of emotional suffering and transformation in the spirituals.

32. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 97.


34. See Jones, *Wade in the Water*, pp. 101-120, for a discussion of the theme of accountability as expressed in the spirituals.

35. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 159.

36. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 97.


52. Spencer, *Protest and Praise*, 141.


55. Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 29


59. Ironically, there once was a whole school of thought that maintained that the influence was forged exclusively in the opposite direction-white to black. See Lovell, *Black Song* for an extensive discussion of the independent evolution of early black American religious music and the subsequent widespread influence of this black music on a wide variety of other music and artistic forms. See especially pp. 75-126,458-470,541-549. See also John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), pp. 40-68, for a discussion of the two-way influences of music; white to black as well as black to white.


62. See *Songs of Zion*, Selection No. 126 for the words and melody of this song as commonly sung today.


64. See also Cheryl Keyes, Chapter 6 in the current volume.

65. See note 50 above.


79. The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble has also released two commercially available recordings: *The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, in Concert* (New York: Arcadia Rec


83. See, for example, Walter F. Pitts, Jr., *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).


**Bibliography**


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