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Crossing Borders with Folklore and Soul Songs: A Stimulating Facet for Identity of Afro-American Slaves

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Abstract:
The culture of any tribal group proclaims itself in varied expressions; art, fictional works, language, and outfit all fall under the reduce going of way of life. In the case of African-Americans, however, one of the most frequent presentations of a unique culture and experience has been the creation and development of particular musical forms. These unique sounds are not only definitive of the culture that created them, but also speak loudly of the traditions of past tribal societies, and the milieu of captivity in the American South. Thus, there are many levels in the study of African-American music, few of which have been examined free of the racial prejudices which infected the views of many scholars. These individuals have discussed the roots, structure, objective, and effect of these songs; the only wide agreement is that African-American music is amazing, evocative, and has a unique and soulful energy.

Keywords: *Culture, Music, Slave, Spirituals*

1. Introduction

The voice of the American slave is cloaked in mystery. Often illiterate and banned from group relationships, most slaves could not discuss their background moments and activities. Yet one main source aspects too many others, which not only offered as evidence to the servant experience, but also showed the nervous fight to maintain someone's identification and humanity in a system that dropped both.

2. To Frederick Douglass, the spiritual

was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains…If any one wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery, let him go to Col. Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance day, place himself in the deep, pine woods, and there let him, in silence thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."[1]

African-American music arises from spirituals. This conventional music, made in the heart of the slave experience, has been the typical ancestors of the doldrums, jazz music, hip-hop, rap, etc. Yet, though all American music that has defined itself as "black" carries some unique features from the spirituals, these musical forms are themselves a custom that amalgamates African-American roots with the American slave experience. How did such beautiful compositions survive the soul-crushing suffering that was American chattel slavery? How were these music created, who performed them, and what part did they play in slaves' lives? What can they tell us about the identity and survival of African-American slaves? In short, though primary historical writings of tribal life in Africa and the experience of Americans slaves might be limited, and though the institution of slavery did it's utmost to dehumanize its sufferers, the spirituals tell a story of survival and adaptation.

First, we must determine the concept and way of the religious, as opposed to gospels or hymns. While all three share a primary assumption of Christian religious function, spirituals were conventional African-American folks songs born out of the experience of Northern American slavery. Though we will examine in detail the particular identifying way of spirituals, their provenance sets them apart from gospels, which are mostly compositions of the twentieth-century black American cathedral affected by spirituals and the

doldrums, each with a unique composer. Hymn music originates from the European Christian experience, and so while some resemblances may exist, it is a very different way of music altogether.[2] This is worth noting, as, "*A common misconception of the nature of the evolution of the spirituals is that enslaved Africans, once acculturated in the new land, abandoned their own traditions…and became "civilized" via the adoption of the Christian religion of their masters."*[3] This typical error not only undermines the reality of African-American slaves' experiences in the New World, but also perpetuates concepts of African-American cultural evolution depending on misconceptions of white supremacy. While slaves certainly did not compose spirituals in a social vacuum, they instead indicate a unique cultural form that combines African musical custom with the impact of bondage.

The question of the provenance and roots of the spirituals has been a central focus point on ethnographic analysis done to date. Some of the earliest scholars made the discussion that it was outstanding that Africans, "half-barbarous people" removed by slavery of any small implicit creativeness or intellect, were able to produce valuable music at all.[4] Others went further and decreed that spirituals were simple efforts at mimicry of great European compositions.[5]These justifications were not depending on musical analysis or anthropological study to truly compare and contrast spirituals to African or European roots. Rather, these scholarly efforts derived from a attitude of incorporated racial discrimination. The theological assumption of Afro-Christianity, and the unique creativity and elegance of the music itself all interwove in a dialogue that centered on the question: how could such music come out of inexperienced and oppressed individuals outside of white direction and control?

If those same scholars had ever performed an examination of African oral traditions, they would have realized the rich history of music in African tribal culture. Like African art, music provided a operate as a main tool in the interaction of history, social organization, entertainment, and faith. Music, specifically singing, was a prominent feature of African life:

If we think of African music as regards its intent, we must see that it differed from Western music in that it was a purely functional music… [There are] some basic types of songs common to West African cultures: songs used by young men to influence young women (courtship, challenge, scorn); songs used by workers to make their tasks easier; songs used by older men to prepare the adolescent boys for manhood, and so on. "Serious" Western music, except for early religious music, has been strictly"art" music. One would not think of any particular use for Hayden's symphonies, except perhaps "the cultivation of the soul." …It was, and is, inconceivable in the African culture to make a separation between music, dancing, song, the artifact, and a man's life or his worship of the gods.[6]

In terms of religious use, we must first understand the basic principles of African spirituality. The emphasis in African religion is on the here and now: gods, spirits, and ancestors are all immediately present in day-to-day life.[7] Without any separating of the spiritual and high-end world, African tribal religions were thus an intimate part of each individual's life, and the main way of religious interaction, music, was correspondingly familiar.

Song also connected individuals within African tribal communities, strengthening the bonds of history, shared ancestors, and communal life. The role of family extends from the importance of past and future relations in African religion: without a prescribed afterlife, an individual's spirit existed only as long as people remembered them.[8]The value of "remembering" resonated throughout African culture. Without an itemized language, Africans conveyed history by oral traditions. Griots, those individuals professionally responsible for relaying history, genealogy, and traditional wisdom, served the critical function of maintaining a social memory and consciousness.[9] Music was an essential process for interacting identity and sharing social mores, conventional traditions, and ethnic history.

Thus, music was a significant component of African culture, one that taken slaves carried across the Ocean into the New World. Though slavers had scammed out them of their goods, their close relatives, their home atmosphere, their health, even identification of their humankind, still many of these individuals were able to hold fast to their identity through their natural musical culture. In fact, despite the inherently destructive environment of slavery, *"constructive processes were operative all along in their history in North America…Their artistic creativity demonstrates so many references to West African culture that those cultural elements must possess impressively enduring qualities."*[10]

Spirituals have an instinctive emotional subject, their very name in accordance with the concept of being complete of spirit. The significance of a call-and-response framework both designed from Afro- American customs and helped in distributing a particular piece of music. A primary source describes, *"I'll tell you, its dis way. My master calls me and orders me a short peck of corn and a hundred lashes. My friends see it, and are sorry for me. When dey comes to the praise-meeting dat night, dey sings about it. Some's very good singers and know how, and dey work it in—work it in, you know, till they get it right, and dat's de way."*[11] Another observer watched the creation of a similar composition in the midst of the Civil War: *The night we learned that we were to lead the charge the news filled them too full for ordinary utterance…At last a heavy voice began to sing, "We-e look like me-en marchin' on, we looks li-ike men-er-war." Over and over again he sang it, making slight changes. The rest watched him intently; no sign of approval or disapproval escaped their lips or appeared on their faces. All at once, when his refrain had struck the right response in their ears, his group took it up, and shortly half a thousand voices were upraised…"*[12]

In inclusion to the call-and-response form, as seen above, improvement also played a big part in the augmentation of spirituals. The freedom of emotional overall look offered itself in harmonies, the use of changing little and important key components,, compacted microtones, and indicated fourths. The musicality of each song was at the interest of the individual performer, in accordance with the emotions he or she was trying to show. While Afro-American principles offered a important cultural framework in tribal life, proselytizing was not a function of the religion, and thus theologically, there was no concept of restriction from applying new deities.[13] In following African tribal traditions, spirituals emerged that clearly indicate their relationship to their faith:

O a little talk with Jesus makes it right, all right,
Little talk with Jesus makes it right, all right,
Troubles of ev'ry kind,
Thank God I'll always find
That a little talk with Jesus makes it right.[14]

To the American slave, Christ was an immediate partner, who very well recognized suffering, emotional and physical discomfort. Christ guaranteed slaves independence and protection, even if they could not have it instantly.

Oh, dey whupped him up de hill, up de hill, up de hill,
Oh, dey whupped him up de hill, an' he never said a mumbalin' word,
He jes' hung down his head an' he cried.
Oh, dey crowned him wid a thorny crown, thorny crown, crown o' thorns,
Oh, dey crowned him wid a thorny crown, an' he never said a mumbalin' word,
He jes' hung down his head an' he cried.
Well, dey pierced him in di side, an' he never said a mumbalin' word,
Well, de blood came twinklin' down, twinklin' down, twinklin' down,
Well, de blood came twinklin' down, an' he never said a mumbalin' word,
Den he hung down his head, an' he died.[15]

The lyrics of this song incredibly, shatteringly indicate that this slave could think about exactly how it experienced to be cruelly tormented and killed—all without the capability to speak a word in their own protection. There was a problem with the trials of Jesus that related to the slave experience, resonating throughout each spiritual's lyrics, tempos, and spirit. Likewise, the spirituals also take much content from the experiences of the oppressed Judaism individuals in the Old Declaration. Prominent Figures who remain through and triumphed over their persecutors were especially celebrated; Daniel, Moses, and Elijah were all the subject of amazing songs. The concept of paradise was also a regular song subject. Like most of the content within the spirituals, it had many understanding. At periods, the discussion of paradise was the mild at the end of the tunnel: the excellent probability of freedom, near family members reunified, and a better way of lifestyle. At other moment, paradise was described with apocalyptic fervor, wonderful self-righteous anger against oppressors obvious when the query was asked:

Ain't you glad, ain't you glad you got good religion…

O sinner, sinner in the mire,
Take my feet out the miry clay.
O this ol' earth goin' reel an' rock…
O on you heaven will rain fire,
Take my feet out the miry clay.[16]

This spiritual promises a day of reckoning, a moment where persecutors will receive not everlasting life, but the fire of heaven. This concept epitomizes the difference between white and black versions of Christianity at this time: for some slaves, the idea of heaven was not a state of blessed peace, but an experience of retribution and revenge against persecutors. Finally, there were many moments where heaven was not a religious concept at all. The realities of slave life demanded the discussion of the perceived heaven on earth: the state of freedom. This religious assures a day of reckoning, a moment where persecutors will get not only everlasting life, but the fire of paradise also. This concept epitomizes the difference between black and white-colored versions of Christianity at this time: for some slaves, the concept of paradise was not a situation of gifted comfort, but an experience of retribution and revenge against persecutors. Finally, there were many moments where paradise was not a devout concept at all. The important points of slave life required the discussion of the identified paradise on earth: the condition of freedom.

As described by Frederick Douglass, *"A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of "O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan," something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the North, and North was our Canaan."*[17] As slaves worked to endure in the American South, they easily designed kinds of level of resistance, both simple and overall. Slaves persisted in an unusual no man's area. Legally, slaves had some identified humanity. A slave had nominal legal protection; the Region of Mexico slave rule verbiage even identified slaves as human beings.[18] Even so, the very framework of slavery required that slaves were products with financial value, chattel that must be kept ignorant, illiterate, and submissive.[19]

In that context, songs were often the method through which slaves indicated their uneasiness, the statement in itself a demonstration and dissent. Frederick Douglass's memoir remembers how listening to spirituals first lighted the real nature of the slave system he had been born into, as to those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery."[20]
Southeast political figures and slave-owners often used the discussion that slavery was a power for slaves' advantage, justifying both the organization and value of slavery, as well as the circumstances of slaves.[21] However, the spirituals provide us an understanding into the facts of their experience:

O Lord I'm hungry I want to be fed,
O Lord I'm hungry I want to be fed,
O feed me Jesus feed me,
Feed me all my days.[22]
O bye and bye, bye and bye
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load.
Hell is deep and dark despair.
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load
Stop po' sinner and don't go there
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load.[23]

These expressions were a declaration of the agony of the slave situation, a dissenting speech that opposed slave-owners efforts to tamp it down. Slaves also rebelled against white-colored culture, recognizing the distinction between their own religious beliefs and white-colored Christianity by performing, *"everyone talks in' 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there."*[24] This condemnation of white religion also states the slaves' desire and belief in eventual justice.

Slaves were regularly at risk of intense retribution for showing any uneasiness, much less defiance. Illustrating from the long-standing African tradition of using paradox and metaphor in fables, songs, and experiences, slaves were able to cover up their real objectives. "Spirituals, by their very nature as folksongs, emerged in such a way that their primary meanings would be understood only to those in the folk community

of origin, Africans in slavery… [this] produced a body of music that could readily be utilized when needed as a basis for secret communication."[25]

The song "*Follow the Drinking Gourd*" was apparently simple to white-colored audience, but provided routing by starlight: to head north, following the direction of the Big Dipper In the same way, "*Wade in the Water,"* sometimes linked to Harriet Tubman, was quickly used as baptism music. It was also, however, training for escape slaves trying evade north to freedom. In the 1869 book of Tubman's authorized biography, she is also described interacting her preliminary evade from her plantation with song:

When dat ar ole chariot comes,
I'm gwine to lebe you;
I'm boun' for de promised land,
I'm gwine to lebe you.
I'm sorry I'm gwine to lebe you,
Farewell, oh farewell;
But I'll meet you in the mornin',
Farewell, oh farewell.
I'll meet you in the mornin',
I'm boun' for de promised land,
On the oder side of Jordan,
Boun' for de promised land.[26]

Individuals like Harriet Tubman or Nat Turner separated itself to the Africa slave areas as not only rescuers, but also fighters battling against the organization that captive them. For many, running north was not an appropriate remedy. Rather, they desired to end slavery for all, and used spirituals as a call to arms. The details of paradise in spirituals went beyond a looking for a better world; for some, the picture of area free of enslavement and struggling were a proactive approach. Quaker students monitoring an African-American camp meeting in 1818 described viewing a ring shout, where restricted of their holy percussion, slaves would use their bodies and systems to make a beat. As it improved in pace and strength, one Quaker youngsters noticed that the people singing around him were, "Joshua's chosen men marching around the walls of Jericho, blowing the rams' horns and shouting until the walls fell."[27]

Change soon came to Afro-American slaves, of course, and battle too. With the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, the long-desired "heaven" had at last come for American slaves. It was soon obvious, however, that there were disconnects between legal liberties and the liberties of social equal privileges and status. Instantly following the Civil War, enemy categories recognized to endanger recently released black Americans and southern law makers easily accepted rules to restrict released black labor, movement, and civil rights.[28]

As Afro-Americans once again fought for life, freedom, and the desire of pleasure, they no more converted to singing spirituals. The songs that had been a source of identity and an expression of feelings became a logo of kept in mind struggling. As described by W.E.B. Dubois, "Negro folksong…has been neglected, it has been, and is, half-despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people."[29]

In the middle of the social changes of the American South during Renovation, one group did work to sustain the information of the spiritual. Instantly following the end of the Civil War, the American Missionary Association recognized Fisk University to provide higher education "regardless of race."[30] One of Fisk's statements to reputation, and probably accountable for its beginning financial survival, was the creation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. In 1870, music professor George L. White suggested a musical show trip of a small university oral collection to increase money. The reputation and requirement for the Fisk Jubilee Singers improved, as did the reputation of their musical pieces.

The Jubilee Singers' spirituals were considerably different from those initially developed by American slaves. These refined activities were used, replicable, and structured for written documentation, a different musical show procedure from the unique improvisation and innovative output of music in accordance with the

moment mood and scenario. Yet the Jubilee Singers immortalized both the music of the spirituals and its concept. Of the unique nine associates, eight were ex-slaves, a proven fact that did not evade the media. As the group extended its trip to European countries, they performed for Queen Victoria lauded as "the best entertainment of the kind that has ever been brought out in London."[31]

Now, these excellent young people have almost all passed through the ordeal of slavery. Most of them have been sold not once or twice, but thrice, and even oftener. Some of them, too, have been in the dismal swamp, pursued by their masters and by the savage bloodhound, but by God's mercy they escaped, and they come here to show to you what the negro race are capable of if you will give them those benefits and opportunities which you have yourselves enjoyed.[32]

The Jubilee Singers' public performances transitioned the spiritual from expression to activism, sharing a message of triumph over oppression. Thanks to the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the many great performers who subsequently kept the spiritual alive, modern musicians, anthropologists, and historians have a unique insight into the life of American slaves.[33] This music indicates the survival of African tribal practices, religions, and structures.

It shows the feelings that associated they tried dehumanization of slaves, the anger, bereavement, and sadness natural in the African-American holocaust. Spirituals are proof and heritage of African-American organization, the will to subvert the requirements of their experts, evade, battle, story, victory, and restore their independence. The spirituals progressed in African-American lifestyle to many other exclusive musical show types. Actual that songs are the spirituals' ongoing concept of success and endurance:

I'm a-goin' to do all I can for my Lord,
For my Lord, I'm a-goin' to pray all I can for my Lord,
For my Lord, I'm a-goin' to bear all I can
'til I can't sing no more…[34]

3. Conclusion

The verse-and-refrain form as well as the themes of the Bible-story lyrics of many hymns fit well with the musical traditions of African American slaves and were easily adapted to serve their purposes. Words or whole verses were added as a means to educate, communicate news or gossip, comfort mind and body, reprimand, tell a story, or give a coded signal. Some spirituals were adapted as work songs. Singing together in rhythm helped laborers to pass the time or maintain the speed and coordination of work movement when necessary. Some singers punctuated the music with clapping hands and stamping feet since they were not allowed to play instruments. (Enslaved Africans in North America were generally not allowed to sing, play instruments, or dance in the ways authentic to their African heritage. This is why there were no drumming traditions among early African Americans, though drumming traditions flourished and evolved throughout African-based cultures in Latin America.) When singing spirituals, slaves sometimes lowered the third, fifth, or seventh notes of the scale, which resulted in "blue" notes, to emphasize a sorrowful theme or verse. Syncopation, the result of shifting the rhythmic emphasis off of the beat, was another favorite method of adaptation among singers of spirituals.

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