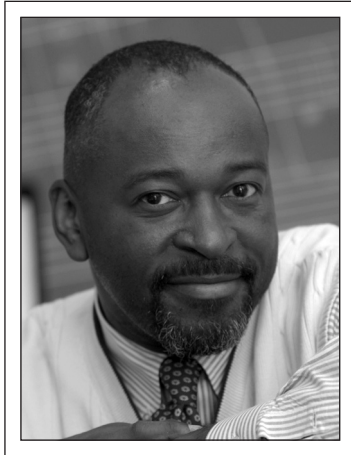


Singing African-American Spirituals: A Reflection on Racial Barriers in Classical Vocal Music



Lourin Plant

INTRODUCTION

America witnessed the passing of three leading late twentieth century exponents of the African-American spiritual within seven months of each other: William Warfield, solo artist/educator; Eileen Southern, Harvard University African-American musicologist; Moses Hogan, pianist, conductor, and arranger. Their deaths coincided with the centenary anniversary of the publication of the *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. DuBois, the great lover of spirituals, who wrote our nation's defining treatise on the meaning of being black in America. Like DuBois, these three dedicated much of their lives to the study and celebration of the African-American spiritual and its important role in the life of our nation. Each knew that the spiritual provides a means for effec-

tive communication across historic racial dividing lines.

Although the world enjoys African-American solo spirituals everywhere, American singers in the last half century have found fewer occasions to sing or record them. This may be due in part to the troubled racial history of the American performing stage, especially in the shadow of blackface minstrelsy, and in the larger realm of a nation struggling mightily with its racial legacy. With race and spirituals in mind, I explore the subject for solo singers in two parts. Part One explores a combination of elements: the barrier of race in solo spirituals; white discomfort with Negro dialect and the conjuring ghosts of blackface minstrelsy; possible rebuke by some African-Americans who believe America's largely unaddressed racial history creates an atmosphere of distrust of whites who sing these sacred songs; or rebuke because it reminds them of a dark time best forgotten. Part One invites reflection on reasons why everyone should sing solo spirituals, although white Americans largely do not. Singing spirituals is centrally important to our education and racial transcendence as a nation. Building on the affirmative premise that solo African-American spirituals are suitable literature for all on the concert stage, I suggest that singing African-American spirituals could bring blacks and whites intimately closer together. Part Two identifies important resources that can help make African-American spirituals an active part of our singing lives. As a nation still coming to grips with its

complex racial legacy, African-American spirituals provide positive means to that end. The path to understanding our nation's racial legacy passes through our shared joys, pains, and sorrows, not by painfully forgetting or fearfully ignoring them. Learning to love, teach, and especially to sing solo spirituals brings us closer to humbly reconciling the truth of what we are, together.

PART ONE— A CALL TO REFLECTION

“. . . the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”¹ (W. E. B. DuBois)

More than one hundred years after DuBois raised the veil on his prophetic *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), his thoughtful statement remains a sentinel of American racial history and again calls the nation to reflection. A call to reflection on race at the start of the twenty-first century is easier said than done. America's history and racial legacy are strangely interconnected; together they frequently overwhelm our best efforts to transcend their resulting difficulties. Such enormity stymies our collective abilities to know how or where to begin—how to approach race issues that historically bind us together and, at the same time, polarize us. Our struggle just to understand is immensely frustrating, which complicates earnest attempts to start and maintain an effective dialogue on racial affairs.

The esoteric world of musical arts contains considerable racial barriers. It also provides opportunities to

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address some of America's persistent and inescapable abiding racial concerns. Such opportunities can touch our lives in profound ways. The mystery of our shared racial legacy is a conundrum that is not easily unraveled, yet remains such an opportunity. The resilient power of music provides for us a path to meaning, understanding, and healing—possibly the first appropriate steps to transformation and definitive change in our racial culture.

A primary example of how the legacy of race erects barriers to shared artistic expression lies within the world of solo vocal classical music. The current disposition of the solo African-American spiritual clearly illustrates both aspects of the perspective: our frozen inability to expressively communicate and our abiding need for understanding.

As an outgrowth of African enslavement in America and Protestant Christianity, African-American spirituals are a unique genre unlike any other developed on the African continent or anywhere else in the entire African diaspora under slavery.² African-American spirituals represent one of our nation's great cultural gifts to the world. Numbering more than 6000 examples, they remain one of the largest bodies of American folk song to reach the twenty-first century.³

Spirituals open an important window of witness and understanding into America's deeply emotional and perplexing racial past. Considering the large number of spirituals and their central role in American music history, why are there so few modern recordings of solo spirituals performed by white artists? Spirituals occupy an important place in the matrix of American music, and yet since World War II, it appears whites have chosen not to perform them. Unlike

Gershwin's opera, *Porgy and Bess*, there is no controlling directive from any composer's estate suggesting that solo spirituals are only for blacks to sing on stage; nevertheless, it seems that way. The legacy of race may forever interfere with the possibility for all Americans to sing this important solo literature—unless concerned musicians and other like-minded individuals attempt to address it.

In my nearly half-century in music, I have heard hundreds of solo vocal recitals of almost every type. Except for some of my own students, I hardly ever have heard a white student or professional solo vocalist sing a solo African-American spiritual on the recital stage. To be sure, I am aware of the Lawrence Tibbett performances, Robert Merrill performances, spirituals sung by Marilyn Horne, Eileen Farrell (a moving "Deep River"), Nelson Eddy, and others from earlier generations and during the civil rights activities of the 60s. There is even the very hopeful modern anecdote of Renée Fleming singing "This Little Light of Mine" as an encore on a recent recital program. Beyond that, however, is a considerable void.

I looked for spirituals in collections of American vocal music recently recorded by America's leading singers, for example, the fabulous, enormously accomplished and socially sensitive American baritone, Thomas Hampson. Barber, Copland, Ives, Adams, and others appear prominently, but hardly any African-American spirituals are among his *oeuvre*. "Go tell it on the Mountain" and "The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy" appear to be the only spirituals in the listing of his ninety-five titles on *CDNow's* web site, these on two separate Christmas CDs. He has a wonderful collection of Stephen Foster, but virtually no spirituals. I examined recordings of

America's preeminent bass baritone, Samuel Ramey, who also has a lovely collection of American music by Barber, Copland, Foster, and Gershwin. A summary search of his seventy-two titles revealed not a single spiritual. American music is beautifully represented in the recordings of Dawn Upshaw—Ives, Copland, Glass, Reich, Harbison, and Bernstein—yet in her fifty-five recordings, I found no spirituals. With concern, I searched other artists' collections and found many examples of the same. I wondered why?

CENTRAL QUESTIONS ON RACE AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

Is there a subtle racial dynamic in our classical performance tradition? Is a silent cultural movement taking place? Much of the evidence is scattered before us, yet because racial issues are at the core, few are openly talking cross culturally about it. Do spirituals conjure up only the negative subject of slavery, to many the third rail of American democracy? Do whites choose not to perform solo spirituals in recital out of discomfort due in part to America's negative racial legacy? Is a stigma attached to performing with dialect? Do singers experience cultural feelings of inadequacy, guilt, or shame when singing spirituals? In deference to African-American artists, do white solo artists abandon this repertoire? Is there a perception that African-Americans discourage whites from singing spirituals? Are spirituals outside the realm of or an affront to the dignity of our best white classical artists? Perhaps whites sing solo spirituals, but those performances seem far below the general cultural radar of the recital stage. Is reluctance to perform solo spirituals attributed to the quality of the

music itself? Could that reluctance be due to fear—fear of offending, of not performing with the right reverence or spirit, fear of judgment, or not doing spirituals justice?

THE AMERICAN STAGE AND RACE: BLACKFACE MINSTRELSY

A central contributing reason that solo spirituals remain a repertoire question for everyone connects with the troubled racial history that is part of most American institutions, including and particularly the American stage. Concerns about racial caricatures on stage are serious and abiding ones, considering the paralyzing and corrosive images created in the offensive history of blackface minstrelsy.

Blackface minstrelsy was the established nationwide nineteenth century theatrical practice, principally of the urban North. White men (and later some blacks largely managed by whites), through ridicule and racist lampoon for sport and profit, caricatured blacks longing for the joys of plantation life while wearing burnt cork-blackened faces, exaggerated red or white lips and white eyes.⁴ It was wildly in demand. Blackface minstrelsy became the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in the United States during much of the nineteenth century.⁵ Harvard University music historian, the late Eileen Southern, further identified blackface minstrelsy's ascent as it "came to represent America's unique contribution to the world entertainment stage."⁶ Blackface minstrelsy's contribution was indeed unique—and unforgettably ugly.

Blacks portrayed by white actors in blackface were already an established part of stage history in England and America, such as the stock character of the noble black savage dying

to save his white master.⁷ What was new was that American performers in the 1820s began to specialize in blackface characters and build entire shows around them, not just as theater or circus *entr'actes*.⁸ Blackface minstrelsy actually began in the Midwest, but Dan Emmett's Virginia Minstrels developed the first definitive minstrel show in New York during 1843. The Virginia Minstrels spread professional and amateur interest from New England to New Orleans in little over a year. Groups such as the Christy Minstrels, which introduced many of Stephen Foster's lyric and comic songs—or after the Civil War, all-black ensembles, like the Georgia Minstrels—carried the style to eager audiences everywhere, from converted churches, synagogues,⁹ riverboats, and salons, to 2,500 seat theaters.¹⁰ Minstrels entertained the great and small, including four U.S. Presidents (Tyler, Polk, Fillmore, and Pierce),¹¹ Queen Victoria, and won the praises of Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Charles Dickens.

Three-Part Structure of Blackface Minstrel Shows

In 1854, while the wealthiest and best educated classes' efforts to establish an Italian opera in America resulted in bankruptcy, the Ethiopian opera "flourished in an intriguing fashion."¹² For the most part, blackface minstrelsy, at times called Ethiopian delineation, represented an original and curious variety-entertainment concoction. Minstrelsy's three-part format—opening, olio, and walk-around—featured racial skits, lyric and comic songs, ballads, instrumental numbers—many with banjo, tambourine, bones, or violin—high-stepped dancing, and improvised edgy banter between the stage and audience.¹³

The opening part's deeply sentimental songs reflected the "nostalgic longing for the joyous days of youth among family and friends in the rural South."¹⁴ It was a crude distortion of the nightmare of the slave experience—with favorite heartrending lyric songs like: Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie" (1856);¹⁵ "Old Uncle Ned" (1848);¹⁶ "Suwannee River or Old Folks at Home" (1851—first version titled "Way Down Upon de Old Plantation"); "My Old Kentucky Home" (1853); "Massa's in de Cold Ground" (1853); "Old Black Joe" (1860).¹⁷ Lost love, and loyalty and love for the master were primary themes. Minstrels presented most songs in verse and refrain format, with soloists on verses and the ensemble in harmony during the refrains.

Part two, the olio, introduced in free fantasy form a parade of comic skits and theatrical parodies that possibly foreshadowed vaudeville farce.¹⁸ Presented in front of a drop curtain, the procession of specialty acts possibly included juggling, acrobatics, parodies of high art—perhaps something by Shakespeare—or novelty musical performances, like musical saw.¹⁹ The olio concluded in a featured high point of the evening, the "stump speech," a political address delivered usually by an endman in broad dialect, or a caricature of it, abounding in *non sequiturs*, ungrammatical malapropisms, and comic stumblings, creating and exploiting the image of the stupid, incompetent, subordinate black²⁰ trying to imitate the high language of his educated white slave master.²¹

Part three's walk-around ensemble finale was the climax of the show, with competitive dancing in a semi-circle. This section featured background scenes of cotton fields or rustic log cabins, which foreshadowed the

Grand Ole Opry.²² Players caricatured slave dance movements during vigorous specialty up tempo offbeat music strung together in medleys of popular tunes, including songs such as “I Wish I Were in Dixie’s Land” (1860—the battle cry of the Confederate army during the Civil War and the *de facto* Confederate national anthem),²³ or “The Boatman’s Dance” (1843). Other important music created or adapted for the minstrel stage included: “Long Time Ago” (1833), also known as “Shinbone Alley,” made famous by Thomas Rice’s Ethiopian Opera; “Turkey in the Straw” (1834), also known as “Zip Coon”; “Ching-a-Ring Chaw” (1833), also published under the title “Sambo’s Address to His Bred’ren”; “Carry Me Back To Old Virginny” (1878), one of over 700 songs created by the most noted African-American song writer of the late nineteenth century, and the successor to Stephen Foster, James Bland;²⁴ “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, Zip-a-dee-day” (1946). Disney used the words from Zip Coon’s old minstrel show theme song in the soundtrack of the animated film, *Song of the South*.²⁵ Perhaps the most famous early blackface minstrel song was Thomas “Daddy” Rice’s “Jump Jim Crow” (1829),²⁶ the song title that for later generations of African-Americans became the moniker and synonym of systemic racial oppression.²⁷ For many, the blackface minstrel show from its inception was America’s unique theater of race,²⁸ speaking volumes about racial caste politics and social hierarchy in American culture.²⁹

Religion was not a part of minstrel portrayals until the mid 1870s, when for the first time, African-American minstrels added religious songs, almost always in dialect.³⁰ The transfer of African-American religious music to the North revitalized stagnating min-

strel traditions. The Fisk Jubilee Singers (organized by George White), and other Southern African-American touring groups, incorporated call-response and antiphonal traditions from southern religious groups into their acts. From that moment, spirituals became a permanent, indeed, the most popular, black minstrel feature.³¹ Many white minstrels also performed this religious music, with many of the same broad theatrics of the established heavily stereotyped tradition.

Lingering Effects of Blackface Minstrelsy

Since what blackface minstrelsy ultimately was, or means in total, is now coming to light, several points have become clear. Historically, African-Americans were not the only group excoriated on American stages. Minstrelsy condemned the women’s rights movement, targeted Chinese and Japanese, and maligned Native Americans for interfering with America’s manifest destiny.³² Practically every immigrant group—Irish, German, Italian, Russian-Jewish—served as the butt of racial/ethnic lampoon for the amusement of those who had arrived earlier.³³ But something of permanent purpose resonated in minstrel lampooning African-Americans as unequivocally inferior, something of fascination and fear, in addition to perceived abject differences of skin and musicality. It seems it was no coincidence that the incredible popularity of blackface minstrelsy coincided with urgent public concerns about slavery, the coming Civil War, emancipation, reconstruction, and the proper position of Negroes in America.³⁴ Historians note that for some white Americans, blackface minstrel shows provided a platform for the ridicule of blacks, serving to

reinforce cohesion among whites.³⁵ Blackface minstrelsy helped poor whites and immigrants assimilate as white men by affirming the inferiority of blacks in a nation obsessed with racial boundaries, at a time when simply being white was not enough.³⁶ As an entertainment medium, blackface minstrelsy became a tool of ridicule in the hands of the working class, exploiting the lowest in society against the aristocracy. It epitomized and concentrated the thrust of racism on African-Americans.³⁷ Although blackface minstrel shows provided the first important employment openings for African-American performers and composers on the nation’s stages, made way for African-American anti-slavery expressions and imagery, and helped develop a mask for resistance and presentation of their hidden culture,³⁸ it also set into motion the pervasive poisons of minstrelsy’s corrosive characters—tambo, bones, old darkey, mammy, auntie, uncle, sambo, rastas, rufus, pickaninny, zip coon, jig-a-boo—highly inflammatory historic characters of depredation and denigration etched forever in America’s racial memory. Blackface minstrelsy faded in popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, yet it remained an important element of amateur productions and carried its images into the emerging entertainment media of vaudeville, radio, film, and television, by renewing, transmitting, and glamorizing its effigies to future generations. Blackface caricatures thoroughly permeated all facets of popular culture and implanted themselves deeply within the American psyche through cinema, circus life, cartoons, popular songs, advertisements, household artifacts, and even children’s rhymes.³⁹ Younger Americans today are very familiar with racial and ethnic stereotypes,

but may be unaware of the popular platform that ultimately gave them voice, helped spread them across the nation, and resonate with resilience in our imaginations. Blackface minstrelsy's widely negative influences are but a small part of a legacy that still creates barriers in music and complicates the stage performance of solo spirituals.

Anxiety over racial misreading in performance or the enmity it could generate in these times is not impossible to understand, particularly in the arts. Eric Lott, author and noted historian of the PBS Special *The American Experience—Stephen Foster*, suggests a fear to address minstrelsy's central legacy could be “desperately indicative of the way in which this country still hasn't surmounted the kinds of feelings that gave rise to minstrelsy in the first place.”⁴⁰ Thus, the central question connects with spirituals: Can all Americans sing the deeply held sorrows and joys of enslaved people in the shadow of blackface minstrelsy and a largely unaddressed racial history? Without a cross-cultural understanding, is this a fearful point of contention? How do we move forward?

I spoke with a retired, white, professional vocal artist who dedicated a significant portion of his career to teaching in the Philadelphia area. He agreed that a number of white solo artists of the generation before and up to World War II sang spirituals occasionally on solo programs. Pressure from the NAACP and the emerging civil rights movement raised accountability consciousness and anxiety levels on the subjects of slavery, discrimination, stereotypes, blackface, and particularly dialect, among other flash points.⁴¹ As a result, quite suddenly, solo spirituals disappeared from white artists' standard concert

repertoire. Whether due to pressure, discomfort, guilt, deference, or artistic conscientiousness, fewer white classical artists after midcentury chose to perform them.

From blackface minstrelsy the element of dialect, considered a remaining vestige by some, conjures past iniquities and continues to create a barrier for whites who love spirituals but are troubled by the risk of performing them on the solo stage. The so-called “Negro dialect” was of great significance since, after the shock and fascination of the visual, much of the illusion that was blackface minstrelsy balanced on the pretentiously sung or spoken word. Heavy dialect helped audiences identify different ethnic groups portrayed in minstrelsy.⁴² Frank Sweet, author of *A History of the Minstrel Show*, suggests that the aspect that most disturbs us today is the troubling focus on invented African-American appearance and customs—mockery made worse by invented dialect and speech mannerisms.⁴³ Blackface practitioners crudely distorted pronunciations for the highest comic effect, carefully gauging audience reaction to black ineptitude. Minstrels used heavy dialect to portray African-Americans as foolish, stupid, and compulsively musical.⁴⁴

Reproach from African-Americans also may contribute to the withdrawal of whites from singing spirituals. Some may feel spirituals represent a time of subservience that is better forgotten and reject its painful remembrances. Many African-Americans feel empowered to protect the sovereign traditions of the spiritual and are critically aware of all who come to sing them. The multiple governing purposes of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) promote a generous exchange of musical ideas and a spirit of fellowship for

all to live in understanding, overriding our racial legacy. This includes the cautious tone of its fifth governing purpose: “to resist the desecration of Negro spirituals.”⁴⁵

As a precious remnant of the encounter between African and European culture in the American South,⁴⁶ spirituals give eternal voice to the righteous hope for freedom, justice, and understanding. As such, they require all who choose to sing them to approach in a correct, knowledgeable spirit of humility and truth. Many may feel that America's grievous denial of her racial heritage creates distrust and antipathy between blacks and whites, especially in the shadow of blackface minstrelsy, so it naturally may generate the wrong atmosphere for spiritual performance by whites, or appreciation by blacks. While these are not universal values, they gain credibility as fewer whites find ways to embrace the spiritual in solo performance.

SPIRITUALS ARE CENTRAL TO OUR EDUCATION

For NANM and for many others, spirituals represent more than a sacred connection to the sufferings of millions of individuals brutally crushed under the weight of systemic oppression. Singing was a vital dimension of the moment and situation of African-American life.⁴⁷ Whether in joy, in agony or sorrow, at work and rest, in worship, in defiance, in flight or danger, in death, in remembrance and the ethereal—spirituals illuminate the singing soul at the center of the incomprehensibly stressful lives African-Americans struggled to carve out for themselves under the yoke of slavery. Tied to that soul is a surprisingly hopeful optimism that transcended the wretchedness of the slave experience.⁴⁸ This is central to why

Singing African-American Spirituals

all solo singers in America should study and learn to sing spirituals. It is an element critical to our transcendence—the act of soulful expression transformed the painful details and episodes of the slave’s experience.⁴⁹ Richard Newman advises that singing from the heart transmutes “these songs of sorrow into songs of resilience and overcoming, and even into affirmations of divine redemption and human triumph.”⁵⁰ Spirituals have much to teach us about the souls of enslaved African-Americans and who they wanted to be. With these truths felt and sung, an undistorted exchange takes place in the minds and hearts of performers and listeners. This dialogue has power to transform us. This is one among several important reasons so many people are deeply emotional and openly moved when they hear or sing spirituals: The truth sets them free. Frederick Douglass thought “. . . the mere hearing of these songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.”⁵¹ Whether or not this is a certain response for all, it is important to begin at this point and build on these truths.

Because of their powerful messages, African-American spirituals are certainly suitable solo literature to be sung by all on the concert stage. Some African-American leaders, like folklorist Zora Neale Hurston and writer James Baldwin, believed spirituals were not meant for concert hall stages. They believed there was no separation between singer and audience, creator or performer, that these songs were authentic only when they were by and for the people themselves, of the moment and of the situation—songs whose “truth dies under training like flowers under hot water.”⁵² Frederick Douglass, who said the

songs of slaves represented the sorrows of the heart, attributed the formation of spirituals to the “soul-killing effects of slavery,” and could not hear them without profound emotion.

They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery . . . let him, in silence, 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” . . . The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.⁵³

W. E. B. DuBois and Harry T. Burleigh, also moved by the music of their ancestors, felt that spirituals have something intimate to say to the entire world. DuBois saw the spiritual as a form of art counterpoint to the debasement of black expression in theatrical minstrelsy and its caricatures.⁵⁴ He wrote the classic literary expression of the idea of “sorrow songs,” or spirituals, in his *The Souls of Black Folk*.⁵⁵ His preeminent description of African-American singing revealed to the world the enormous capacity for expression and identity these ele-

mental songs provided for America’s nameless sons and daughters.

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs (Spirituals) there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?⁵⁶

Burleigh, encouraged by Antonín Dvořák, became an early African-American pioneer of the recital hall spiritual, and created numerous solo arrangements for concert hall performance. He taught the world that successful performance was dependent on deep spiritual feeling.

The voice is not nearly so important as the spirit; and then the rhythm . . . it is an essential characteristic. Through all of these songs there breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man. The cadences of sorrow invariably turn to joy, and the message is ever manifest that eventually deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come, and man—every man—will be free.⁵⁷

Spirituals continue to speak and challenge all singers to seek the emotional center of the truth belonging to those whose spirits first gave up their cries in agony and despair. Spirituals urge us to find hope in every phrase and to express it. These remain fitting lessons for all Americans.

SPIRITUALS ARE CENTRAL TO OUR PERFORMING LIVES

Certainly there is no corresponding reluctance to perform spirituals within the world of choral music

where almost every choral ensemble—white or black, black and white, whether middle school, high school, college or community chorus, from the highest ranks in the choral art to the most fledgling—includes spirituals on its programs. Choral spirituals are extremely popular, and white soloists perform freely in them. Americans sing spirituals around campfires, at summer retreats, on school buses, in churches, at festivals, and at informal gatherings of singers, young and old, across the country. From Minnesota to Florida to California, from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to the Harvard Glee Club to the Chicago Children’s Choir—African-American spirituals are a beloved staple of modern choral repertoire. This is true not only in America, but across the face of the globe. Somewhere deep in my memory I remember the Vienna Boys Choir bringing down the house with a heartfelt “Swing low, Sweet Chariot.” The choral literature of African-American composers and arrangers—Hall Johnson, Edward Boatner, Harry T. Burleigh, William Dawson, Nathaniel Dett, Jester Hairston, Lena McLin, Florence Price, Eugene Simpson, William Grant Still, Undine Smith Moore, Roland Carter, John Work, Wendell Whalum, and Moses Hogan—stands along side arrangements by distinguished white American composers and arrangers, like Robert Shaw, Jack Halloran, Alice Parker, and Norman Luboff. In September 2001, Oxford Music Press, seizing on popular interest, issued its choral anthology of great American spirituals, *Oxford Book of Spirituals*, edited by the late Moses Hogan, containing spirituals by many of these leading black and white composers and arrangers. Based on the world’s love of choral spiritual arrangements, Oxford’s anthology is a success.

At a recent gathering of voice majors (education and performance) in a recital/repertory class of about thirty, I asked how many students had performed spirituals in a chorus somewhere in their experience. Every hand went up in affirmation, and to my amazement, most students clearly knew the titles, even the arranger/composer of the settings. An energetic exchange followed on the quality of the music and the terrific spirit it generated. Then I followed up with the question, “How many students have performed solo spirituals outside of the choral setting, either in studio work or on solo recital?” Not one student could say that he or she had.

PROBLEMS CROSSING THE COLOR LINE

With subjects like spirituals, slavery, discrimination, and especially blackface minstrelsy, the element of race is important. “It appears that a race blind approach, one where race is irrelevant, would be ineffective in dealing with this subject.”⁵⁹ Scott Malcomson rightly suggests that, under the circumstances, in America a look beyond race may have strange consequences, as race itself being historical resists ahistorical explanation. Possibly the only way through this problem is through it. CJ Williamson, Editor-in-Chief of *Classical Singer* magazine, stated that sometimes “the only way to get rid of the infection of discrimination is by opening the wound.”⁶¹ We can begin the healing process by breaking the silence surrounding our racial legacy in music. Blackface minstrelsy was the primary example of the way American popular culture exploits and manipulates African-Americans and their culture. The performing arts became a fundamental platform used in defining

and spreading the contagions of racial stereotype, fear, discrimination, pain, and antipathy. Through the African-American spiritual, the performing arts again can transmit important messages about our cultural life—messages of beauty, hope, strength, racial understanding, action, transformation, and transcendence.

Needed changes in the classical solo vocal tradition should begin with education and understanding. During my undergraduate music degree program, and later two graduate degree programs at one of the largest conservatories in the Midwest, I can attest that the only people who routinely sang spirituals were African-Americans. I heard no spirituals on the solo vocal programs of any of my white colleagues, although programmatically such music would have been appropriate and relevant. From my recollection, none of the applied voice professors sang spirituals or taught their white students spirituals. Our general history of Western music courses completely omitted the subjects of blackface minstrelsy and spirituals. For the sake of the music and our national history together, this must change. We can and should move consciously forward together. Like the butterfly, I believe we can fly, but our cocoon of silence and ambivalence will have to go. We need confidence and character to make progress on these fronts.

PART TWO— SINGING AFRICAN- AMERICAN SPIRITUALS: RESOURCES TO HELP MAKE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS AN ACTIVE PART OF OUR SINGING LIVES

1. *A respectful knowledge of African-American spiritual history and music is the beginning of a useful cultural*

understanding that contributes to authentic performance. Black and white audiences are willing to extend an abundance of understanding and encouragement when artists approach performances with these essentials intact. If what is taking place in the choral world suggests the healthy enthusiasm in the populace for spirituals, then voice professors have a useful model to follow for success. White solo artists may feel greater comfort teaching and performing solo spirituals by using many of the same techniques used in the preparation of other sensitive literature. A commanding knowledge of the spiritual and America's racial history is fundamental for the teacher, performer, and audience member. Voice teachers can take the lead on this preparation and guide others carefully through it. It is necessary to review the odious legacy of blackface and how its consciousness of oppression and discrimination has seriously affected our racial perceptions, including solo spirituals performed by whites in dialect on the concert stage. The subject should be an important part of our general Western music history courses, classical and popular. For a perspective on blackface minstrelsy, I recommend three books: Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America*; Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*; Bean, Hatch and McNamara, *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. I recommend the extensive blackface materials that are part of the PBS SPECIAL/WGHB American Experience Stephen Foster website,⁶³ which includes important questions with answers by four historians on the subject. I strongly recommend beginning with Marlon Riggs's fifty-eight minute

documentary "Ethnic Notions: Black People in White Minds" (1987) from California Newsreel.⁶⁴ These resources may help change perceptions forever.

Several key reference books examine the history of the spiritual and its meaning and place in the lives of African-Americans. John Lovell's *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, a highly detailed volume of encyclopedic importance on African-American spirituals, is absolutely indispensable. Arthur C. Jones's *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* is an insightful, classically well integrated book on the wealth of information and social implications of spiritual traditions. Dr. Jones references fifty-nine spirituals in startling, authoritative discussion. The endnotes and bibliography are priceless. This book is also essential.

2. *African-American spirituals are suitable literature to be sung by all on the concert stage.* This statement reaffirms the obvious, but remains necessary. Vincent Harding offers an important caveat.

... the spirituals are available to all persons who are prepared to open themselves to the unsettling, healing power that inhabits these marvelous songs of life. These songs were created out of "deeply meaningful, archetypally human experiences, relevant not only to the specific circumstances of slavery but also to women and men struggling with issues of justice, freedom and spiritual wholeness in all times and places."⁶⁵

Perhaps more important than voice and technique, the attitude of the singer is the critical ingredient necessary for successful performance. Hall Johnson calls it the "one all-important consideration—the right mental attitude on the part of the singer."⁶⁶

3. *Search deep within the text and music for the proper attitude and spirit, and the true expression begins to reveal itself.*

I am convinced that it is impossible to gain a full understanding of the spirituals from an examination of song lyrics alone, without hearing (and especially singing) the rhythms and melodies of the songs as well.⁶⁷

Consulting *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* by John Lovell, Jr.⁶⁸ and Jones's *Wade in the Water* will greatly assist in meaningful analysis. They are essential references on spiritual texts, their poetic and melodic structures, hidden meanings, and biblical subreferences. For example, Lovell points out that the words "love" and "hate" are very rarely mentioned in spirituals, the word "hate" hardly at all.⁶⁹ Yet, spirituals are full of the demonstration of love. "The fact that the spiritual has no word for hate seems rightly to suggest that hate is a useless commodity . . ." ⁷⁰ Arthur Jones adds,

We have much to learn from these wise composers and singers, for many of them were able to transcend an experience of extreme degradation, emerging from it as spiritually, morally and emotionally evolved human beings. The fact that there were so many emotional and physical casualties is not shocking; the fact that there were so many who emerged from their suffering to live on psychological and spiritual "higher ground" is . . . All of these spirituals teach us, more effectively than any other means imaginable, the unlimited possibilities for human transformation and the manner in which the transformation process is aided and supported by the power of song and symbol.⁷¹

Howard Thurman's *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, James Cone's *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*, and Paul Robeson's *Here I Stand* are also very helpful.

4. *Try to approach the subject of "Negro dialect" with understanding. Struggling to grasp the language of*

their masters under the most oppressive and extreme conditions, African slaves in America made great efforts to learn English, many times spoken in dialect by lower and working class Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and English immigrants living in the American South. At least seventy percent of the ancestors of Americans of African descent came from the Mande (West African) and Bantu (Central African) ethnic groups.⁷² These diverse people represented a multiplicity of complex linguistic sources that did not contain several sounds in common with the English language. For nearly three hundred years, more than ninety percent of these African-Americans lived in the South, accounting for the Southernness of African-American English.⁷³ As a legacy of slavery and segregation, many vestiges continued in the pronunciations of slave descendants. For example, the *th* sound was alien and difficult. This sound, especially initial in words, became *d* in approximation.⁷⁴

than	became	<i>dan</i>
they	became	<i>dey</i>
the	became	<i>de</i>
that	became	<i>dat</i>
this	became	<i>dis</i>
with	became	<i>wid</i>
father	became	<i>fader</i> (perhaps influenced by Scotch dialects)

The *th* sound when final became *f* in approximation.⁷⁵

mouth	became	<i>mouf</i>
truth	became	<i>truf</i>
breath	became	<i>bref</i>
path	became	<i>paf</i>

In difficulty, sometimes *th* was omitted altogether.⁷⁶

neither	became	<i>ne'er</i>
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Final and postvocalic *r*, that is, “*r*” at the end of a word or after a vowel was not heard—instead a vowel sound replaced it.⁷⁷

summer	became	<i>summah</i>
torn	became	<i>tone</i>
your	became	<i>yo</i>

In difficulty, sometimes final consonant groups were reduced to a vowel sound or single consonant sound.⁷⁸

cold	became	<i>coal</i>
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From his lifelong study and performance of spirituals, Hall Johnson, instructed that the racial qualities of the words “should neither be unduly exaggerated in the hope of being more entertaining nor, still worse, ‘purified’ into correct English—for any reason whatever. Either process would utterly spoil the artistic integrity of the performance.”⁷⁹ He further suggested that dialect forms did not necessarily arise from “ignorance of the correct pronunciation.”⁸⁰

Sometimes they were deliberately chosen in order to avoid harsh or difficult sounds, or to render the word more serviceable for the immediate occasion. Especially in the Negro folk song, the word is always made adjustable to the rhythm of the music. Consequently this altered word-form may vary all the way from the correct English pronunciation to the most extreme contractions of the dialect . . . Here are examples of some of the most familiar alterations:

Heaven—Hev’n—Heb’m—Heb’n—or just He’m
 Children—chil-dun—child’n—chillun
 There—dere—dey or day
 For—fə or f’
 To—tə or t’
 My—ma—mə or m’⁸¹

Johnson also insisted that *de* (like *the*) is always pronounced *dee* before vowels and *duh* before consonants.⁸² The

preface notes to Johnson’s anthology are very useful to the informed spiritual singer.

Several important textbooks discuss many anomalies of African-American dialect speech patterns making the experience of singing Negro dialect understandable. I recommend: *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* by James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson; *Black Talk: Words and Phrases From the Hood to the Amen Corner*, revised edition by Geneva Smitherman; *Lexicon of Black English or Perspectives on Black English* by J. L. Dillard; and *American Regional English Today* by Allan Metcalf.

5. Listen to classic spiritual recordings by leading African-American singers and closely note their many stylistic treatments. There are many fine examples: Roberta Alexander; Marian Anderson; Martina Arroyo; Kathleen Battle; Wilhelmenia Fernandez; Denyce Graves; Hilda Harris; Roland Hayes; Richard Heard; Mahalia Jackson; Kevin Maynor; Robert McFerrin; Oral Moses; Jessye Norman; Odetta; Jo Ann Pickens; Leontyne Price; Florence Quivar; Derek Lee Ragin; Bernice Johnson Reagon; Paul Robeson; Louise Toppin; and William Warfield.

Robert McFerrin’s *Deep River and Other Classic Negro Spirituals*, currently out of print, but found still in many library collections around the country, is an outstanding collection of fourteen spirituals, recorded in New York City in June 1957. The recording sessions occurred two years after Mr. McFerrin’s debut as the first African-American male performer at the Metropolitan Opera, and only the second African-American after the historic first performance of Marian Anderson in 1955. This recording is noteworthy not only because of the

exemplary performance by Mr. McFerrin and his accompanist Norman Johnson, or that his is one of a handful of spiritual recordings by African-American men, but along with arrangements by Burleigh, Still, and Lawrence, his recording represents one of the largest collections of some of the best of Hall Johnson solo spiritual settings ever recorded (eleven)—a *tour de force*. Mr. McFerrin's baritone voice is in remarkable profile, and his timing and expression, especially in the works, "Ain't got time to die," "I got to lie down," "Oh, Glory," "Witness," "Ride on, King Jesus," are hallmarks of the style.

6. *Recruit leading African-American vocal artists to teach the spiritual style, attend and sing in voice classes, workshops, and master classes where the spiritual is the focus.* Hall Johnson strongly suggests that the singer who has no first hand acquaintance with the authentic racial style of spirituals should have "for the best results, either an intelligent model or a coach who is thoroughly familiar with this music at its source."⁸³ Many leading African-American voice teachers annually coach students in current spiritual repertoire. For example, the annual convention of the NANM is a terrific forum for contacting excellent senior African-American concert artists, like Silvia Olden Lee, or in the recent past, the late William Warfield. Lovers of music throughout the world honor William Warfield as one of the great vocal artists of our time, as he achieved stardom in every field open to a singer's art. Silvia Olden Lee (who concertized with Paul Robeson) is noted as the first African-American woman on the Metropolitan Opera staff and as a world renowned vocal coach. Her students include Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman, and Wilhelmina Fernandez.

7. *Sing accompanied or unaccompanied solo spiritual arrangements.* A list of African-American spiritual anthologies follows the endnotes. Singers originally performed spirituals without accompaniment or audience: all in attendance sang.⁸⁴ Early arrangements like those by Burleigh, Work, Johnson and Johnson, and Boatner add color and support to the vocal line. Piano arrangements by Hall Johnson and Moses Hogan also add sophisticated counterpoint and dimension to all the rhythmic texture. Many spiritual arrangements, some of the most elaborate, are published as single, individual settings. Singers should also remember that a long unaccompanied performance tradition exists for spirituals of every style and tempo. Virtually any spiritual can be performed effectively and stylistically in this manner. Careful focus on the text, form, scale, color notes, strong rhythmic elements, silences, and a text-inspired sense of improvisatory embellishment transform the smallest melody into a prayerful intercession. Many African-Americans continue to believe that the unaccompanied spiritual is the highest form of the art. Sung either way, accompanied or unaccompanied, they are effectively expressive.

8. *Consult major library collections for African-American spiritual resources.* Education centers across the country have gathered special collections of materials dealing with the history of African-American performers and arrangers of spirituals. In addition to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, and The E. Azalia Hackley Collection of Negro Music, Dance, and Drama in Detroit, a brief list of important collections of African-American arrangers and performers across the nation appears in Table 1.

Perhaps the most impressive collection that I have referenced is the Marian Anderson Papers at the University of Pennsylvania, housed in the Penn Special Collections of Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library. It is the principal repository of her personal and career documents, which date from early in her performing career (before 1926), to late in her retirement (1993). The collection comprises 495 boxes containing correspondence (6500 folders with over 6000 individual correspondents—among the most important composers, arrangers, singers, conductors, scholars, writers, and world leaders of the twentieth century), manuscripts, biographical materials, journals, contracts, programs, awards, honorary degrees, memorabilia, fan mail scrapbooks, photographs (over 4400), speeches, recordings, items from her family, among other materials.⁸⁵ Her music library contains more than 2000 printed scores and more than 2000 songs in manuscript, including many by African-American composers (especially Florence Price, Hall Johnson, Will Marion Cook, Harry T. Burleigh, William Dawson, R. Nathaniel Dett, William Grant Still, among others). Women make up approximately one third of the composers who sent manuscripts to Miss Anderson.⁸⁶

Although Miss Anderson was at the center of a racial/political conflict resulting in her historic outdoor concert at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday in 1939 (well documented with over 2000 letters from her fans), she was not inclined to write about her personal feelings or to analyze some of the issues, including race, about which she constantly was asked.⁸⁷ Few of her letters expressed her feelings on religion, love, or racial politics.⁸⁸

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Table 1. Collections of Spirituals, Arrangers, and Performers.

Collection	Location
Anderson, Marian	University of Pennsylvania, Penn Library Collection
Burleigh, Harry T.	Atlanta University Center, Harry P. Slaughter Collection
Dawson, William	Emory University, Woodruff Library Afr-Amer Collection
Dett, Robert Nathaniel	Hampton University Library, Harvey Library Collection
Duncan, Todd	University of Michigan School of Music
Fisk Jubilee Singers	Fisk University Library Special Collections
Hayes, Roland	E. Azalia Hackley Collection, Detroit Public Library, Roland Hayes Museum, Calhoun Gordon Arts Council
Jessye, Eva	Eva Jessye Collection, Leonard H. Axe Library, Pittsburg State University [Kansas]
Johnson, Hall	Rowan University Music Library (in preparation)
Johnson, James Weldon	Fisk University Library Special Collections
Jones, Sissieretta	Howard University Moorland-Springarn Research Center Nicolas Slonimsky Collection, Library of Congress
Moore, Undine Smith	Indiana University, Undine Smith Moore Collection
Price, Florence B.	University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections
Robeson, Paul	Columbia College, Chicago, IL, Robeson Centennial Celeb. Howard University Moorland-Springarn Research Center, New York Public Library, Robeson Collection, Princeton Public Library, University of Chicago, Robeson Archives Listings
Still, William Grant	Duke University Special Collections Library, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections
Warfield, William	Eastman School of Music Silbey Music Library, University of Michigan School of Music
Work III, John Wesley	Fisk University Library Special Collection

Altogether, the collection is a marvel, immaculately maintained, with controlled access, and a well informed, cordial staff. A complete description of the Marian Anderson Papers is viewable on line. Several aspects of the collection are viewable in their

entirety on the web, including her enormous photograph collection.

9. *All voice teachers should consider singing spirituals on their programs and use such performances as excellent educational opportunities to bring attention to the current state of the spiritual.*

Be courageous. Breech the gap separating whites from spirituals, mindful that this is a major point of fear and historical contention. A performer prepared with information and understanding can do it. Allow each performance to be part of a conscious effort to reconcile the division in our performing traditions. In the end, a voice teacher's example is the positive light students will follow.

10. *Read several slave narrative accounts for an informed perspective.* Slave narratives are invaluable to the spiritual singer. These primary testimonies are filled with numerous details of slave life. Historians estimate that there are approximately 6000 published narratives by African-American slaves spanning 170 years of testimony, from book length autobiographies to short newspaper accounts and interviews.⁸⁹ Many are contained in modern anthologies, like the important collection edited by Yale University history professor John Blassingame. His book, the largest modern collection of slave narratives, contains first person accounts about culture, plantation life, sexual exploitation, and psychological responses to bondage.⁹⁰ These important eyewitness accounts are provided by a variety of persons: house and field servants; slaves docile and rebellious; urban and rural slaves.⁹¹ Harvard University African-American Studies Director Henry Louis Gates, Jr. insists that authentic slave narratives are of great significance since African-American slaves were among the only enslaved people in the world to produce a body of writing that testified to their experiences.⁹² Perhaps the most famous narrative is that written by fugitive slave Frederick Douglass.⁹³

With the Emancipation Proclamation, the end of the American Civil War brought freedom to over four mil-

lion slaves in 1865. Nearly 100,000 of these former slaves were still alive seventy years later in the period of the Great Depression.⁹⁴ During the Depression, the Work Projects Administration, through its Federal Writers Project, recorded interviews with more than 2400 of these former slaves about their life experiences under the institution of slavery. HBO Documentaries, in association with the Library of Congress, produced *Unchained Memories: Readings From The Slave Narratives*, a seventy-four minute film based on sections of the slave narrative collection readings, supplemented with archival photographs, music, and period images.⁹⁵ Whoopi Goldberg narrated the film, which includes excerpts from dramatic narratives read by noted African-American actors. The book, a multi-linked interactive website,⁹⁶ and VHS or DVD formats are available. The web site also has a link with Questia's slave narrative resources.⁹⁷

11. Consider the poetry of the Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights Era as useful supplements. This poetry could be useful to connect the suppressed and veiled messages of slaves in spirituals by tracing it through the oppressed lives of their descendants in the next generations. What slaves possibly felt and were unable to sing or say directly resonates within the thoughts of their descendants. Their words illuminate the timeless complexities of oppression, its permutations, and the fragile, universal dream that is freedom, and all resilient movements toward it. Teamed with a historian or narrator, one could create a moving program of music and the spoken word. Here is a short list of poets to consider: Maya Angelou; Amiri Baraka; Arna Bontemps; Gwendolyn Brooks; Sterling Brown; Lucille Clifton; Countee

Cullen; Paul Laurence Dunbar; Mari Evans; Nikki Giovanni; Robert Hayden; Calvin Hernton; Langston Hughes; James Weldon Johnson; Naomi Long Madgett; Haki R. Madhubuti; Claude McKay; Ismael Reed; Carolyn Rodgers; Sonia Sanchez; Quincy Troupe; Alice Walker; Margaret Walker; and Richard Wright. There are many others. Two great anthologies of African-American poetry are very useful: *Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African-American Poetry*, edited by Jerry W. Ward, Jr.; *In Search for Color Everywhere: A Collection of African-American Poetry*, edited by Ethelbert Miller.

12. Consider on-line sources for materials about spirituals and performance practice (see Table 2).

An important on-line source is the survey on the Art of the Negro Spiritual website organized by Randy L. Jones (<http://www.artofthenegrospiritual.com/survey.html>). Its goal is to obtain the views of vocal students, professional singers, voice teachers, and vocal enthusiasts on the challenges of studying and singing Negro spiritual settings for the solo voice.

There are other hopeful anecdotal signs taking place in the solo vocal world. For example, recently I spoke with a white young professional solo vocalist in Philadelphia who reports that his African-American voice teacher made a significant impact on his understanding, appreciation, and performance of spirituals. His teacher's instruction and example greatly enhanced his learning experience. Through his teacher he gained comfort with dialect and elements of improvised style. He felt comfortable, supported, and encouraged to try the history and material. Now he sings spirituals with authority and authenticity. I believe his learning experience is not an isolated one.

Spirituals are part of the solo vocal competition scene as well. The American Negro Spiritual Festival that showcased college choirs and their soloists in competition in Cincinnati for many years is inactive at this time. However, the American Traditions Competition (Savannah, Georgia), now in its tenth year, is a premiere solo vocal competition devoted to the musical heritage of the United States.⁹⁸ The competitors' program selections cover a wide spectrum of American music, ranging from Broadway show tunes to jazz to spirituals. A spiritual may be sung as part of the preliminary, quarter, and final competition phases. As part of the program requirements of the semi-final round, contestants are required to sing an American spiritual.⁹⁹ Spirituals are an important element of the Leontyne Price Vocal Arts Competition and the Marian Anderson Guild's Music Competition of the National Association of Negro Musicians.

Another hopeful anecdotal sign points to the tendency of some white major American solo vocalists to sing spirituals abroad, which possibly suggests a sense of freedom to sing the literature in a less judgmental atmosphere. We should encourage our artists to bring their performances home.

CONCLUSION

African-American spirituals are important literature for all singers. By giving up our silence, and by moving into dialogue and performance of African-American spirituals, we get so much more in generous return for the nation and ourselves. Hall Johnson's words on what the spiritual gives to the singer and listener speak volumes to our heart.

... in direct proportion as these songs are delivered with simplicity, even with

Table 2. Internet Websites Dedicated to African-American Spirituals.

African-American Art Song Alliance	http://www.afrovoices.com/index.html
African-American Spirituals	http://gigue.peabody.jhu.edu/~jstuckey/spirit.html#History
Africans in America	http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html
Afro-Centric Voices in Classical Music (Bibliography)	http://www.afrovoices.com/index.html http://www.afrovoices.com/bookstore/author.html
Art of The Negro Spiritual	http://www.artofthenegrospiritual.com/index.html
Center of Black Music Research, "Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs: Indexes to Selected Periodicals," by Robert Sacré	http://www.cbmr.org/pubs/bmrjback.htm
EdSiteMent-Spirituals	http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?ID=318
Glimpses Issue #89 "Slave Songs Transcend Sorrow"	http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps089.shtml
Marian Anderson: A Life in Song	http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/anderson/
Negro Spiritual Quarterly, The	http://www.dogonvillage.com/negrospirituals/
Negro Spiritual (Thomas Wentworth Higginson Article in <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> , 1867)	http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/1867jun/spirit.htm http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TWH/twh_front.html
Official Site of History of Negro Spirituals	http://www.negrospirituals.com/
Penn State Annual Celebration of Spirituals	http://www.artsandarchitecture.psu.edu/news/spirituals_012903.html
<i>Questia's</i> Online Spiritual Resources	http://www.questia.com/popularSearches/spirituals.jsp
Reference Materials on Spirituals & Partial Discography	http://www.ymbarnwell.com/Spirituals.htm
Spiritual And The Blues	http://www.nathanielturner.com/spiritualandblues.htm
Spirituals: A Research Bibliography (The North Star)	http://northstar.vassar.edu/volume1/vln2bib.html
Spirituals Project, The	http://www.spiritualsproject.org/

reverence, each song being allowed to speak for itself, the singer will find his audience-reaction more and more gratifying and himself vastly enriched by the experience.¹⁰⁰

Also we can reclaim spirituals as a

great resource in transforming our nation and ourselves.¹⁰¹ Lovell, Cone, Jones, and Paul Robeson understood and reclaimed the spirituals as perhaps they were meant to be: songs of powerful motivation, determination,

and inspiration that sustained African-Americans through slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation; songs of power and action that moved this nation through its second revolution—the civil rights revolution; songs of conscience and transformation waiting to bring us to that place where we need to be—together.

DuBois' historic foretelling of America's central color line problem still echoes truth to us from our past. Racism, frustration, fear, injustice, and antipathy have been our history—they need not forever be our state of being or derail our future. No American should avoid singing solo spirituals; rather, we should learn to sing and embrace all they represent, taking them into our minds and hearts. Our nation persists in the midst of a righteous struggle of the heart to reconcile its past for the sake of its future. Douglass, DuBois, Burleigh, Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. knew well: The heart is the place where true change begins. The path to understanding our racial legacy passes through our shared joys, pains, and sorrows, not by painfully forgetting or fearfully ignoring them. Learning to love, teach, and especially, to sing solo spirituals brings us closer to humbly reconciling the truth of what we are, together.

Dennis Speed, in a moving article about the spiritual for the Schiller Institute, suggested that the drama of the lowly African-American spiritual possesses the power to greatly impact our hearts and humanity, saying, "Not force, but beauty, will change America."¹⁰² Given an opportunity, the musical arts again could be an important forum for our racial reflection, and the African-American spiritual, even in the shadow of blackface minstrelsy, could be its matrix.

Singing African-American Spirituals

NOTES

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32. Ibid., 166.
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35. Stark, 139.
36. Ibid., 51.
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43. Sweet, 18.
44. Toll, 67.
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Dr. Lourin Plant holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Wittenberg University, Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in Choral Conducting from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. He has served on the voice faculties of Sinclair College and Humboldt State University of California.

Now in the tenth year of his appointment at Rowan University, he has served as coordinator of the vocal/choral division and conductor of the Rowan University Chamber and Concert Choirs. His choirs have appeared in regional music conventions, four appearances at the New Jersey State Legislature, and three times at Carnegie Hall.

Dr. Plant is a member of the Marian Anderson Guild of the National Association of Negro Musicians, the American Choral Directors Association, and New Jersey Music Educators Association. He has served as an adjudicator and clinician, conducted the All-Region II Chorus for the Central Jersey Music Educators Association, and has presented vocal workshops and choral adjudications for New Jersey State Teen Arts Festivals.

Dr. Plant concertizes as both countertenor and baritone throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Mid-West states. He has performed with Cincinnati Opera, Cincinnati May Festival, Dayton Opera, Amherst Early Music Festival, Humboldt Bay Early Music Festival, Philadelphia Classical Symphony, Philadelphia Ancient Voices, Voces Novae et Antiquae, Piffaro, Jim Thorpe Bach Festival, and in the touring ensembles of Michael Crawford, Barbra Streisand, and Russell Watson. He has performed in ensembles with the Opera Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Singers Chorale in the Philadelphia Academy of Music, the Philadelphia Regional Arts Center (Kimmel Center), and in Carnegie Hall.

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