

THE RHETORIC OF AFRO-AMERICAN MUSIC

by

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O black and unknown bards of long ago
How come your lips to touch the sacred fire?
How, in your darkness, did you come to know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?
Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?¹

Chapter I

Introduction: Nature of the Problem

Afro-American music historically has represented, at both a conscious and unconscious level, black rhetorical communication.² Very early in America the black man, having been denied or restricted in his use of conventional means of communication such as the public platform and the press, developed other highly sophisticated communication channels. His music, much like the grapevine communication network in which messages traveled from slave to slave and even from plantation to plantation over large geographical areas, developed as a substitute to conventional communication channels.

¹James Weldon Johnson, "O Black and Unknown Bards," Saint Peter Relates an Incident, (New York: The Viking Press, 1935), p. 25.

²The term "rhetorical communication" is used here synonymously with the definition of rhetoric offered by Arthur L. Smith, the communication of ideas, values, opinions and beliefs in an effort to elicit the approval or acceptance of others. Arthur L. Smith, Rhetoric of Black Revolution, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970), p. 2.

The early music, especially spirituals and blues, contained messages and strategies for dealing with the unique experience of blackness in America. Virtually no song was sung which could not be turned by the skillful rhetorician into a call for, or response to, action. The innate flexibility of black music allowed itself to blend into almost any adaptation the ingenious communicator wished to make.

Viewing black music as a medium of persuasive communication, the following study will investigate the rhetorical nature of Afro-American music. The important question this investigation will seek to answer is: How does Afro-American music, specifically spirituals and blues, function rhetorically?

Relevance of the Question to Research in Speech Communication

To a large extent almost all of the professional speech journals and other speech communication literature which has been concerned with Afro-Americans has focused on specific orators and the rhetorical devices they employ. Rhetorical analysis of speeches under various circumstances have been primary subjects of interest. This is particularly

noticeable in some of the regional speech journals. A far lesser amount of attention has been given to rhetorical analysis of Afro-American music. What references that are made to music in professional journals, books, and other scholarly works about Afro-Americans tend to treat the music strictly as an art form, or as a means of enhancing a speech or sermon. With few exceptions, communication scholars and much of the speech communication literature has neglected to view Afro-American music as an oral form with rhetorical implications. Stephen Kaye, one of the few communication scholars who has investigated persuasive elements in music, approaches the study of music from the viewpoint that song is a rhetorical medium, particularly songs of social action.³ Kaye contends music is a fertile area for rhetorical analysis and suggests more scholarly research is needed to analyze the rhetorical effects of music.

Significance of the Question

.. All Afro-American music can be classified according to

³Stephen Arnold Kaye, The Rhetoric of Song: Singing Persuasion in Social-Action Movements, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1967).

a specific form or music genre. ✓ My concern with the music forms, spirituals and blues and their significance for Speech Communication study, is that they are part of the Afro-American's oral cultural tradition. Early spirituals tell a great deal about Afro-American life prior to the turn of the century. "The spiritual," as A. Grace Mims puts it, "expressed the black man's grief and sorrow, and his hope for a better day."⁴ W.E.B. Dubois who pre-faced each chapter in The Souls of Black Folks with a spiritual phrase refers to "Sorrow Songs" or spirituals as original American folk songs.

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days - Sorrow Songs - for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these wierd old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men.⁵

✓ The musical genre called blues is a secular extension of spirituals; they too tell a great deal about the development of the Afro-American. In the early years the blues "dealt with the black man's interaction with his new environment, the oppressive struggles of work, torment and

⁴A. Grace Mims, "Soul; The Black Man and His Music," The Negro History Bulletin, Vol. 33, No. 6 (October, 1970), p. 141.

⁵Dubois prefaces each of the fourteen chapters in The Soul of Black Folks with a Spiritual phrase. William E.B. Dubois, The Soul of Black Folk, included in Three Negro Classics. edited by John Hope Franklin, p. 378.

the never ending fear of the unpredictable future."⁶
 As a musical form they are commonly considered a recent product of the black cultural heritage.⁷ The blues, according to historian Paul Oliver, are a special kind of music peculiar to the situation of black people in America.⁸

✓ It is important that blues and spirituals be considered together because all of the music called blues derives from spirituals. [Furthermore, spirituals and blues when taken together reflect not only the history of black people in America, but changes in American civilization as it grew from the farm to the factory, and from small rural township to the larger cities.

Added to the importance of the oral tradition of spirituals and blues, the study of Afro-American music

⁶Robert V. Weinstein, "Black 'N Blues." The Negro History Bulletin, Vol. 32, No. 5 (May, 1969), p. 13. Weinstein says, "Feelings and moods changed as this country grew, for the blues spoke for an entire people, cleansing the impurities of everyday life and giving sustenance for one's day to day existence."

⁷Blues or what LeRoi Jones and other ethnomusicologist call the "Blues ethos" has always existed in Afro-American music. See LeRoi Jones, Blues People, (New York: William Morrow and Company), 1963. Mims suggest that blues developed definitely after slavery. A. Grace Mims, "Soul; The Black Man and His Music," p. 142.

⁸Paul Oliver, Screening the Blues, (London: Cassell and Company LTD), 1968.

is an important study in self-realization. That is to say, as the black man's perspective of himself in relation to society changed, his music changed in direct proportion. As a result these questions about Afro-American music can be asked:

1. How are the issues of slavery and freedom dealt with?
2. How was each new problem which confronted the newly emancipated slave dealt with in song?
3. In what way does the Afro-American continue to use his creative music as a powerful and forceful rhetorical tool?

Preliminary Inquiry: Review of the Literature

My preliminary inquiry has revealed a plethora of materials written on Afro-American spirituals and blues music. The majority of the material, however, is not explicitly concerned with music as rhetoric. The literature may be divided into three primary classifications associated with music psychology, ethnomusicology, and the social history of the Negro.

Literature Associated with Music Psychology

One of the unfortunate shortcomings of books concerned with music psychology is the heavy emphasis placed on the

serious music of the West. Paul R. Farnsworth's The Social Psychology of Music is an excellent case in point.⁹ This book is a formal text in the psychology of music, which pays little attention to folk music. The content of the chapters are structured for the reader who has sustained interest in Western music and psychology.

A Psychology of Music by Diserens and Fine appears more applicable to the study of ethnic music than Farnsworth's book.¹⁰ Diserens and Fine attempt to explain social phenomena connected with the development of music such as are observable in myth, magic, religion and medicine. The book explores the psychological function music serves and reviews experiments in music psychology. The book is not well documented at times and frequently does not substantiate the generalizations made. A book published the same year as Diserens and Fine's study is Mursell's The Psychology of Music. Mursell's book states that music is an art whose characteristics and organizing

⁹Paul R. Farnsworth, The Social Psychology of Music, (2nd. ed., Ames: The Iowa State University Press at Ames Iowa, 1968).

¹⁰Charles M. Diserens and Harry Fine, A Psychology of Music, (Cincinnati: College of Music, 1939).

principles depend upon the action of the mind.¹¹ The book is similar to The Social Psychology of Music by Farnsworth in that Mursell's work is also concerned generally with symphonic and vocal music associated with classical composition. Despite his preoccupation with classical music, Mursell does postulate some fundamental assumptions about music useful to this study. Those postulates are:

1. Music is a medium of expression.
2. Music can carry a great wealth of emotional significance. Like other forms of original expression, music is unquestionably and intimately a product of life experience and of emotions of daily living.¹²
3. Music is a way of perceiving and organizing auditory experiences in terms of the intrinsic effects of sound.¹³

Literature Associated with Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is the study of music, music documents, or music development associated with a particular ethnic or

¹¹James L. Mursell, The Psychology of Music, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1937), p. 13.

¹²Ibid. p. 264. In Chapter I, pp. 13-46, Mursell also discusses the emotional appeal of music.

¹³Ibid. p. 49-148.

racial group.¹⁴ My use of the term in conjunction with Afro-American music includes those ethnomusicologists who not only interpret and analyze black music, but who also concern themselves with the music's sociological statement. In this regard it would be impossible to study spirituals, blues, or more recent sophisticated Afro-American music forms without turning first to LeRoi Jones.

Two major works by Jones, Blues People and Black Music, are indispensable aids to a serious study of Afro-American music.¹⁵ Blues People aims to reveal through socio-anthropological as well as musical scrutiny something about the essential nature of Afro-Americans through a study of their music. This book traces the history of the music from West African origin to Afro-American Jazz. Jones suggests the importance of music to social history when he writes:

¹⁴I first became familiar with the term ethnomusicology in reading an article by Ulf Hannerz entitled, "The Rhetoric of Soul: Negro Identification," reprinted from Race, Vol. 9, No. 4 (April, 1968), p. 459. The term is taken literally to mean a study of ethnic (race) music.

¹⁵LeRoi Jones, writer and poet, is considered by many to be one of the most out-spoken critic and writer of black "culture." Jones is a product of the black experience and brings a knowledge of his culture to bear on his analysis of black music.

LeRoi Jones, Blues People. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963) LeRoi Jones, Black Music. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1968).

It seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro Music proper to whatever moment of the Negro's social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs, a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period.¹⁶

Black Music is a series of essays and critiques written by Jones between 1961 and 1967. Throughout these essays Jones interprets the new directions of black music. Black Music is of special value to my study because it reveals how black music grows and redefines itself out of traditional spirituals followed by blues.

✓ In addition to LeRoi Jones, the work of Charles Keil deserve careful attention.¹⁷ Keil has made an intensive study of what he terms "Urban Blues." His book by the same name attempts to analyze the blues phenomenon from the black urban male perspective. His social analysis of the bluesman, although limited by its urban focus, is particularly interesting and informative.

✓ Phyl Garland, like Jones, is a black ethnomusicologist. Her work, The Sound of Soul, examines the ethnic forces that went into the making of Afro-American music as she attempts

¹⁶LeRoi Jones, Blues People, p. 65.

¹⁷Charles Keil, Urban Blues, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

to discover how deeply Afro-American music has penetrated the cultural core of America and how all of this came about?¹⁸ For the student familiar with Keil and Jones, Phyl Garland provides balance. Her analysis of blues sung by some of the "high priestesses" of Soul fills some serious gaps and corrects the male identity concept in Urban Blues. Garland's historical analysis of the development of black music compliments and is complimented by the social implications evident in Jones' works.

✓ Harold Courlander's Negro Folk Music U.S.A. is of special interest to this study because Courlander attempts to explicate some of the common themes of black music.¹⁹ Many of the earlier Negro spirituals and blues songs can also be found recorded in this work.

Maud Cuney Hare's Negro Musicians and Their Music pro-

¹⁸Phyl Garland, The Sound of Soul, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969).

¹⁹Although Courlander does not effectively explicate numerous themes from his study of these songs, he presents some insights worth pursuing from a rhetorical perspective. The major theme he derives from spirituals for instance is the relationship of these songs to the Bible. His analysis does not consider rhetorical messages contained within the music.

Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

vides an historical background of early Afro-American Songs.²⁰ In her comprehensive work Hare discusses African songs and their influence on Afro-American music. She presents an anthology of Afro-American songs representative of the periods in which they were created. H.E. Krehbiel's Afro-American Folksongs is also a study in racial and national music.²¹ Impressed by the works of both Dubois and Colonel Wentworth Higginson, Krehbiel is credited with being one of the first persons to seriously study black music as an indigenous American folk form. His definition of folk music is applicable to this study. Older studies or comments about black music by music scholars can be found in the anthology, The Negro and His Folklore, edited by Bruce Jackson.²² This anthology contains numerous observations on Afro-Americans by different writers. The articles all of which were written in the 1800's are listed chronologically.

"Occasionally antebellum writers set down snatches of slave

²⁰Maud Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1936).

²¹Henry Edward Krehbiel, Afro-American Folksongs, A Study in Racial and National Music, (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1914).

²²Bruce Jackson, ed., The Negro and His Folklore, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1967).

songs and other lore in novels, diaries, travel books, and autobiographies of exslaves, but it wasn't until the civil war that these songs became prominent subjects of literary speculation and written recordings."²³ At that time "many Northern whites were so impressed by spirituals that they wrote about them and published books about them."²⁴ Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, one of the first to attempt written recordings of the songs, wrote:

The war brought to some of us, besides its direct experience, many a strange fulfillment of dreams of other days. It was a strange enjoyment, therefore to be suddenly brought into the midst of a kindred world of unwritten songs, as simple and indigenous as the Border Minstrelsy, more uniformly plaintive, almost always more quaint, and often essentially poetic.²⁵

The historical spirituals compiled in Slave Songs of the United States were not published until 1867. The editors of that edition marveled over the fact that despite the recognition of the music capacity of the Negro race no systematic effort had hitherto been made to collect them.²⁶

²³Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore.

²⁴H.E. Krehbiel, Afro-American Folksongs, pp. 2-3.

²⁵Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Negro Spirituals," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 19 (June 1867) p. 685.

²⁶William Francis Allen, Charles P. Ware and Lucy M. Garrison, Slave Songs of the United States, (New York: A. Simpson and Co., 1867), p. 1.

Ralph H. Metcalfe, Jr., A. Grace Mims and Robert V. Weinstein have written brief, but excellent articles on Afro-American Music.²⁷ Metcalfe's "The Western Roots of Afro-American Music, Mims' "Soul, the Black Man and his Music" and Weinstein's "Black 'N Blues" are concerned with social themes. The content of these brief essays, when applied to Courlander's explication of common themes in black music, yields forceful insights.

Sterling Brown has written a somewhat longer article than the essays previously mentioned which cover a plethora of songs and their meaning. In "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," Brown writes,

The makers of the spirituals, looking toward heaven, found their triumphs there. But they did not blink their eyes to the troubles here. As the best expression of the slaves' deepest thoughts and yearnings, they speak with convincing finality against the legend of contented slavery.²⁸

²⁷See: Ralph H. Metcalfe, Jr., "The Western Roots of Afro-American Music," The Black Scholar, Vol. 1, No. 8 (June, 1970), pp. 16-25. A. Grace Mims, "Soul, the Black Man and his Music," The Negro History Bulletin, Vol. 30, No. 6 (October, 1970), pp. 141-142. Robert V. Weinstein, "Black 'N Blues," The Negro History Bulletin, Vol. 32, No. 6 (May, 1969), pp. 13-15.

²⁸Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," Phylon: The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture, Vol. 14 (1953), p. 47.

Lydia Austin Parrish has collected slave songs and recorded impressions of Afro-American music in Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands.²⁹ Parrish's book is an excellent effort to preserve the regional slave songs that have so impressed her.

Literature Associated with the Social History of the Negro

This section is included because it is impossible to study spirituals and blues without considering the historical context from which the music emerged, developed, and expanded. In addition, valuable knowledge is gained from those sections of historical literature devoted to Afro-American music.

From the socio-historical viewpoint, Janheinz Jahn has written two vital works about the life culture of the Afro-American. His books A History of Neo-African Literature and Muntu: The New African Culture relate the African cultural heritage, investigate influences of oral literature, and

²⁹Lydia Parrish, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands, (New York: Creative Age Press, Inc., 1942).

interpret the meaning of Negro spiritual and blues forms.³⁰

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Dubois is an important sociological statement about black people in America. In regard to the music of black people, Dubois states, "It has been neglected, it has been and is half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood."³¹ In addition to Dubois' book, The Negro in American Culture by Margaret Butcher, A Pictorial History of the Negro in America by Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, Black Struggle by Bryan Fulks, Rhetoric of Black Revolution by Arthur Smith, Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature edited by Abraham Chapman are also important sociological statements about Afro-Americans which can contribute to a rhetorical assessment of black music.

Method of Study

My method of study will focus on a review of literature primarily associated with Afro-American music. In chapter

³⁰Jahnheinz Jahn, A History of Neo-African Literature, (London: Farber and Farber LTD., 1966). Jahnheinz Jahn Muntu: The New African Culture, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961).

³¹W.E.B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk, p. 378.

two I will investigate the rhetorical characteristics of music in general and specific variations, if any, from these general characteristics as they relate to the major categories of Afro-American music. Following this investigation, I will examine the rhetorical exigences that gave rise to spirituals and to some extent other black musical genres.

In chapters three and four I will consider the development of Afro-American music in historical time periods, i.e., (social-cultural contexts). Both chapters, while exploratory, will be concerned with the following basic hypothesis: that Afro-American music traditionally reflects the black man's environmental thinking at a particular point in time and his rhetorical strategies for dealing with the realities of that environment. Specifically chapter three will be concerned with the historical time periods in which spirituals dominated the musical creations of black Americans. The general social-cultural context out of which spirituals developed and meaningful sub-categories of the social-cultural context, if any, will be investigated. The categories of musical response to the general and specific social-cultural context, will be examined. What was it like

for example, during the period 1850-1875? How was this period reflected in songs? Why did the social-cultural conditions lead to the "sorrow songs"? Are there any significant rhetorical differences in the sorrow songs? Do these songs present different "solutions" to the problems facing Afro-Americans?

Since spirituals precede blues in their dominance of black music, and are the focus of chapter three, chapter four will turn to an investigation of the social-cultural context from which blues gained prominence as a black musical form. In chapter five I will present specific comparisons and contrast of the various historical periods covered and lists some conclusions about the rhetoric of Afro-American music. Finally, chapter five will discuss problems encountered during the course of this study and offer suggestions for future inquiry.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus
Steal away, steal away home,
I ain't got long to stay here
My Lord, He calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul
I ain't got long to stay here.¹

Chapter II

Introduction

In respect to spirituals and blues, this chapter is concerned with two things: one, identification of rhetorically persuasive characteristics in music and their specific variations as they relate to Afro-American music: two, investigating the rhetorical exigencies contributing to the black man's early use of music as an agency for sending and receiving messages.

Rhetorical Characteristics of Music and Their Variations in Afro-American Music

In observing the general characteristics of music, there are an infinite number of elements that can be observed and isolated for the purpose of investigation. Certain of these

¹"Steal Away" is a spiritual. The Negro Caravan, edited by Sterling Brown. (New York: The Dryden Press, 1941), p. 435.

elements, however, seem more closely associated with the rhetorical characteristics of music. The six characteristics to be examined here are: repetition, variation, contrast, comparison, imagery, and rhythm.

Repetition

It is essential that music contain repetition because music is constantly in motion and repetition helps to insure the transmission of an idea from source to receiver. Such repetition is intrinsically persuasive in that it accounts for the receiver getting the intended message.

The refrain or chorus is the built in apparatus for achieving repetition in songs. The chorus of most songs, although they can be varied, usually consist of a section containing a fixed set of words. "Sinner Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass" is a good example of an Afro-American song with not only a fixed refrain, but a fixed pattern for each stanza. This chorus,

Sinner please don't let this harvest pass,
Sinner please don't let this harvest pass,
Sinner please don't let this harvest pass,
And die and lose your soul at last,

is sung after each of the following verses.

I know that my Redeemer lives,
 I know that my Redeemer lives,
 I know that my Redeemer lives,
 Sinner please don't let this harvest pass.

Sinner, O see the cruel tree,
 Sinner, O see the cruel tree,
 Sinner, O see the cruel tree,
 Sinner please don't let this harvest pass.

My God is a mighty man of war,
 My God is a mighty man of war,
 My God is a mighty man of war,
 Sinner please don't let this harvest pass.²

Many times the refrain of a song will be built into each verse. Notice, for example, the last lines in each of the following:

Good Lord, in the mansions above,
 Good Lord, in the mansions above,
 My Lord, I hope to meet my Jesus
 in the mansions above.

My Lord, I've had many crosses,
 And trials here below;
 My Lord, I hope to meet you
 in the mansions above.

Fight on, my brother,
 For the mansions above;
 For I hope to meet my Jesus there,
 in the mansions above.³

² John Work, American Negro Songs and Spirituals, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1940), p. 191.

³Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971), p. 217.

There is nothing peculiar to Afro-American music in regard to repetition. However, as it is the means by which an audience becomes familiar with the theme of a song, it is worth noticing that this feature dominates music and that this repeated material contains the most significant part of the message of a song. In black music, a frequently observable practice for achieving repetition is for the leader's part of a song and the responsive audience part of a song to overlap. The response may consist of a repetition of the line sung by the leader. For example, in the lines, "Guide me over Thou Great Jehovah, pilgrim in this barren land," the audience begins its repetition as the leader completes the line.⁴ Usually the audience will try to recapitulate the exact tonal qualities set by the leader. Sometimes the leader will repeat the line with his audience, while at other times he will act as a patient listener. Once the audience has repeated a line or phrase, they will pause before going on thereby allowing the leader to initiate the same pattern with a new line. In some instances, individuals might begin to sing the refrain before the leader concludes his solo, and the leader might begin

⁴All lines in this song are normally sung very slow and with prayerful deliberation.

his next solo before the chorus or refrain is finished.

Repetition is denoted in a variety of ways. Frequently, in blues, and some spirituals, repetition is incorporated in four line AAAB or three line AAB patterns in which first lines are statements and the last line is response.⁵ "Love, Oh Love, Oh Careless Love," uses the AAAB pattern.

Love, oh love, oh careless love,
 Love, oh love, oh careless love,
 Love, oh love, oh careless love,
 You see what careless love has done.

It's gone and broke this heart of mine,
 It's gone and broke this heart of mine,
 It's gone and broke this heart of mine,
 It'll break that heart of yours, sometime.⁶

Variation

Another persuasive element found in music is variation. Variation is necessary because it breaks unchanging repetition and keeps attention focused on word images. Variation is achieved by manipulating a main idea or reoccurring theme

⁵Blues songs have an elusive quality in their structure and pattern. They do not in every instance conform to the AAAB quatrain or even an AAB pattern which characterize many of the songs. Courlander in Negro Folksongs U.S.A.; Jones in Blues People; and Locke in The Negro and His Music (New York: Arno Press, 1969) are among those who suggest the AAAB pattern as a basic characteristic of blues. Frequently blues, especially early blues, are rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter in related or non-related series.

⁶Langston Hughes and Arno Bontemps, ed. Book of Negro Folklore, p. 390.

in such a way that it produces either a new insight or a different approach to an old problem. "Good Lord in the Mansion Above" (p. 21) uses variation of the first line of each stanza to highlight the idea repeated at the end of the stanzas.

The efficient music rhetorician strives to inject variation by taking advantage of unique word usage, changing sentence patterns, and through accelerated movement of his music. Of these modes of achieving variation, the Afro-American distinguishes himself by his ability to coin new words and capitalize on existing meanings of old words. In early spirituals, this ability to manipulate and capitalize upon word meaning was especially important because words used, and any variation of them, had to be precise and clear.

Contrast and Comparison

Two additional persuasive elements found in music are contrast and comparison. Significant comparison clarifies a subject or theme in music by indicating similarities between things, while contrast indicates differences. A singer who develops his song chronologically, as in a ballad, will often digress from the primary method of development

and introduce a comparison to set his theme in a new perspective. The singer may, as in the following song, illuminate a recently introduced subject (say, sinners) in the light of an already familiar subject (say, no sinners in heaven) by means of a brief comparison.

Well, there are sinners here and sinners there,
 An° there are sinners eve'ywhere;
 But I thank God that God declare,
 That there ain't no sinners in heaven.

Heaven, Heaven,
 Everybody talkin° 'bout heaven ain't goin°
 there,
 Heaven, Heaven,
 Goin° to shine all 'round God's heaven.

Well, there are drunkards here an° drunkards
 there,
 An° there are drunkards everywhere;
 But I'm' so glad that God declare,
 There ain't no drunkards in heaven.

Heaven, Heaven,
 Preachers all preachin° 'bout heaven ain't goin°
 there.
 Heaven, Heaven,
 Goin° to shine all 'round God's heaven.⁷

⁷Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1925), p. 98.

Occasionally, ideas are described in contrast to one another, so that the song centers around more than one theme. In black music, contrast is often implied rather than stated. This is demonstrated in the Spinners' song, a Negro African song thought to be the first such song printed in English.

The Winds roared and the rain Fell,
 The poor white man, faint and weary
 Came and sat under our tree.
 He has no mother to bring him milk,
 no wife to grind him corn.

Chorus

Let us pity the white man, no mother has he,
 The loud wind roared, the rain fell fast,
 He sat him down, beneath our tree
 For weary, sad, and faint was he;
 And ah, no wife or mother's care
 For him the milk or corn prepare.

Chorus

The white man shall our pity share,
 Alas, no wife or mother's care
 For him the milk or corn prepare.
 The storm is o'er; the tempest past
 And Mercy's voice has hushed the blast.
 The wind is heard in whispers low;
 The white man far away must go!
 But ever in his heart will bear
 Remembrance of the Negro's care.

Chorus

Go, white man, go-but with thee bear
 The Negro's wish, the Negro's prayer;
 Remembrance of the Negro's care.⁸

⁸Maud-Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, p. 37.

The true subject of this song is an American explorer named Mungo Parks.

Parks had been compelled to seek shelter in a small village, but was unsuccessful in finding someone who would take him in, and so consequently had to spend the entire day sitting under a tree without food. Towards evening as a thunderstorm threatened, a woman passing took pity on him and invited him to her home. She gave him supper and directed him to a mat where he could sleep. The woman and her companions spent the greater part of the evening spinning cotton. They sang songs as they worked, one of which was extemporized on the subject of Parks.⁹

The Spinners' song contrasts the inhospitality shown Parks with the hospitality of the woman who gave him food and shelter. The last chorus, which is a moral appeal, attempts to remind Parks of the unstated, but implied differences in that treatment.

Imagery

Another persuasive element found in music is imagery. Imagery or word pictures are created by the music rhetor to hold attention and sustain interest. To accomplish this end, the music rhetor selects expressions which are accurate, clear, and impressively vivid. If the music

⁹Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans, pp. 16-17. For a more complete history of the unusual circumstances surrounding this song see: Mungo Parks, "From Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa," Eileen Southern, ed., Readings in Black American Music, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971), pp. 4-7.

rhetor, is particularly adept, he will also select expressions that suggest as well as denote.

Utilization of effective imagery is a persuasive skill because, in choosing music imagery, the rhetor must consider word pictures best adapted to a given audience, to a particular occasion, and to the subject. Each of the following is a typical example.

I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow,
I'm in this wide world alone

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

One of dese mornings, five o'clock
Dis ole world gonna reel and rock¹⁰

One observes immediately that music can arouse imagery of a very personal nature.¹¹ This is especially true of black music. Throughout the music, song texts are marked by vivid imagery with emphasis on metaphoric figures of speech, and lines that stand out for their striking figures. Furthermore,

the Negro not only sees objects and persons clearly but he makes others see what he himself sees. His pictures stand out in bold relief, they are

¹⁰Langston Hughes, Book of Negro Folklore, pp.291-300.

¹¹Paul Farnsworth, Social Psychology of Music, p. 70.

painted on appropriate backgrounds. The total impression, be it serious or ludicrous is formed with unchangeable definiteness.¹²

A simple experiment will demonstrate the Afro-American's ability to visualize. Let each of the following stanzas be taken separately and read; let the impression be formed quickly and the extent of the completeness of the mental picture ascertained with exactness. Then compare this with the actual scene described and see with what unerring power the picture has been forced upon the mind.¹³

Judge an' jury all in de stan'
Great big law books in deir han'.

Clothes all dirty, ain't got no broom,
Ole dirty clothes all hangin' in de room.

Standin' on de corner, didn't mean no harm,
Policeman grab me by my arm.

Went to sea, sea lock so wide,
Thought about my babe, hung my head an' cried.

Went up town Fiday night-went to kill a kid,
Reach my han' in my pocket-nuthin' to kill
him wid.

Said to jailer how can I sleep?
All 'round my bedside policemens creep.¹⁴

¹²Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, The Negro and His Songs, pp. 269-70.

¹³Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 270-71.

These glimpses of images couched in poetic language barely begin to represent the extensiveness to which Afro-American music is characterized by imagery. One but needs to recall the many pictures portrayed in the spiritual genre alone to see the pervasiveness of this element.

Rhythm

In addition to imagery, contrast, comparison, variation, and repetition, still another rhetorical characteristic found in music is rhythm. Rhythm has been a classical instrument of music for transmitting emotional stimulation. According to Wayland Parrish, "Rhythm is a rhetorical device which consists of effects repeated at regular intervals of time, and is intended to give distinction of style or leisure to the audience."¹⁵

Since rhythm is a general characteristic of all music, how does the Afro-American's use of rhythm differ from that of other racial groups? Music historian Maud-Cuney Hare in a discussion of Negro idiom and rhythm states:

¹⁵Wayland Maxfield Parrish, "Rhythm in Oratorical Prose;" Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winan, (1925), pp. 217-230.

Negro rhythm differs from the majority of racial musical rhythms in that great variety and complexity of its accents which ignore any division of time that follows the natural pulse of a regular metrical beat. Accents are anticipated or held over beyond their expected time. The resultant syncopation early became known as Ragtime.¹⁶

Eileen Southern, in a technical analysis of rhythmic features in early black music, also says,

Rhythm is the most striking feature of the slave music. This is obvious even through the transcribers made errors in some of the rhythmic notation as they did in the notation of pitch. The rhythms were much more complex in actual performance than the music scores indicates.¹⁷

Southern goes on to say that slave melodies typically are marked by syncopation.¹⁸

Rhythm is persuasive in black music to the extent the Afro-American responds to rhythm by participating in it through tapping his feet, dancing, snapping his fingers, or responding with some physical or mental motion. In doing so, the listener is carried along by a characteristic of rhythm called beat. Rhythmic beat can be compared to the ticking of a watch or the throbbing of a heart beat. These

¹⁶Maud-Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, p. 133.

¹⁷Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans, p. 206.

¹⁸Syncopation refers to shifting of melodic accent. Typically in slave music melodic accents are shifted from the strong beats of the music to the weaker beats. Ibid., pp. 206-208.

beat indicate aliveness, and the music of Afro-Americans come alive and take on meaning through rhythm.

In many songs, the beat of the music assumes more importance than words. In worksongs, for instance, individuals working in unison measure both energy and motion by musical interval and sheer rhythmic pulsation. The motion of work seems to call forth the song, while the song in turn strengthens the movement of the workers.¹⁹

Early Afro-American Music: A Necessary Rhetorical Medium

Rhetoric, even when music is the medium of expression, is concerned with what Arthur Smith described as "the communication of ideas, values, opinions and beliefs in an attempt to elicit the approval or acceptance of others"²⁰ Smith states that "within his particular situation, the rhetor attempts to discover means with which to show the aptness of his message."²¹

Under conditions such as those existing during slavery

¹⁹Guy Johnson and Howard Odum, The Negro and His Songs, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1925) pp. 246-68.

²⁰Arthur Smith, Rhetoric of Black Revolution, p. 2.

²¹Ibid.

in which communication between different ethnic and linguistic clans was difficult, the almost universal African regard for the power of the spoken word (Nommo) contributed to the development of alternate communication patterns in the worksongs, sermons, and the spirituals with their dual meanings, one for the body and one for the soul.²² The effectiveness of this communication outlet has been documented in many of the slave narratives. Frederick Douglass and other ex-slaves tell of the "double-talk" of the spirituals.

Canaan, for instance stood for Canada; and . . . fairly easy allegories identified Egypt-land with the South, Pharoah with the masters, the Israelites with themselves and Moses with their leader. 'So Moses smote de water and the children all passed over; children ain't you glad that they drowned that sinful army?'²³

In songs, such as the one prefacing this chapter, the lyrics "The trumpet sounds within-a my soul, I ain't got long to stay here" told a slave contemplating his escape that his opportunity was imminent. This means of transmitting and receiving messages was effective for several

²²Arthur L. Smith, "Socio-Historical Perspectives of Black Oratory," Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 56, No. 3, (1970), pp. 264-269.

²³Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expressions," p. 48.

reasons. First, music itself was not distracting to overseers who encouraged slaves to sing as they went about their work. Second, on the surface, spirituals appeared to white slave masters as harmless laments of an uncivilized people. Third, white attitudes coupled with traditional stereotypes of blacks frequently kept slave owners from realizing the communication effects of these songs.

Exigencies Contributing to the Rhetorical Development of Afro-American Music

In assessment of the value of spirituals, the black chronicler Langston Hughes wrote:

In the old days, the slave had no way of protesting against their fate, without danger of being whipped or even killed, except through their songs. So into the simple lines repeated over and over, went all the pain and sorrow of their bondage, compressed and intensified into the very essence of sorrow itself.²⁴

Adapting songs to function as vital communicative expressions was a remarkable feat in light of the social situations in which blacks found themselves. Most blacks were, according to institutionalized patterns of behavior,

²⁴Langston Hughes, Famous Negro Music Makers, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1955), p. 24.

forbidden to take part in open discussion or confrontation. Ante-bellum social policy restricted the dark American's access to formal educational experiences. Under these inhibiting conditions, music both articulated and veiled the Afro-American's ideas, feelings and emotions.

Black music probably would not have attained a high degree of rhetorical sophistication had it not developed during slavery. In an analysis commenting on the historical development of black music, H.E. Krehbiel contends:

Nowhere save on the plantations of the South could the emotional life which is essential to the development of true folksong be developed; nowhere else was there the necessary meeting of the spiritual cause and the simple agent and vehicle. The white inhabitants of the continent have never been in the state of cultural ingenuousness which prompts emotional utterance in music.²⁵

Krehbiel's analysis helps to explain why music became the communicative outlet chosen by black Americans. Nowhere, except in the simple musical medium did blacks have the means to vocally address themselves. Their music acted as a rhetorical kind of discourse.

²⁵H.E. Krehbiel, Afro-American Folksongs, p. 22.

Afro-American Music: A Form of Rhetorical Discourse

To equate music with rhetorical discourse is "to understand that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance."²⁶ In terms of the Afro-American, his inequity in social, economic, and political status were causes of dissatisfaction. Blacks were considered unequal and inferior. They were denied historically the right of self-identity and existed legally, socially and politically in a sphere designated subordinate to whites. Their inferior status could not continuously be tolerated without blacks seeking some form of redress.

Since traditional avenues of communication were either closed or restricted, vocal utterance as a means of redress presented some unique problems. The absence of conventional channels left a communication vacuum in which alternative modes of expression had to be developed. Within the matrix of this vacuum, music gained prominence as the fitting response to some of the exigences confronting black Americans.

²⁶Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1968), p. 4.

The Afro-American's early use of music parallels the postulates on rhetorical discourse suggested by Lloyd Bitzer.

In Bitzer's words:

(1) rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem; (2) a speech is given rhetorical significance by the situation, just as a unit of discourse is given significance as answer or as solution by the question or problem; (3) a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse, just as a question must exist as a necessary condition of an answer; (4) many questions go unanswered and many problems remain unsolved; similarly many rhetorical situations mature and decay without giving birth to rhetorical utterance; (5) a situation is rhetorical insofar as it needs and invites discourse capable of participating with the situation and thereby altering its reality; (6) discourse is rhetorical insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it; (7) finally, the situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution.²⁷

Bitzer's analysis of rhetorical discourse can be recapitulated as follows to clarify its application to black music: (1) music is the discourse presented by the Afro-American in an attempt to open for himself vital channels of communication, thus music represents one solution to the unique problems facing blacks who were systematically denied access to traditional communication outlets; (2) the rhetorical signi-

²⁷Ibid.

ficance given to music must be viewed in relation to the social situations music addressed; (3) the social inequities brought about by institutionalized slavery created a fertile field for some kind(s) of rhetorical discourse; (4) under conditions of slavery, specific rhetorical situations could possible mature and decay without giving birth to rhetorical utterances, but, there were too many problems associated with slavery for music not to produce some rhetorical responses; (5) despite its emotional impact, music is capable of suggesting alternative modes of behavior and to the extent music was used by slaves to give direction and suggest action it functioned as a means of altering the slave's reality; (6) music discourse functions appropriately when utilized by skilled black rhetoricians; (7) finally, the slave's political, legal, and social situations affected the types of rhetorical messages and responses he transmitted and received through music.

Sinner, please don't let this harvest pass;
Sinner, please don't let this harvest pass;
Sinner, please don't let this harvest pass;
And die and lose your soul at last!¹

Chapter III

Introduction

An important question, raised in chapter one, relevant to the study of Afro-American music, is how does Afro-American music, specifically spirituals and blues, function historically in respect to rhetorical issues facing black people in America? In this and the following chapter, the primary concern will focus on answers to that question.

Leroi Jones' basic hypothesis that Afro-American music traditionally reflects the black man's environmental thinking at a particular point in time and his strategies for dealing with the realities of that environment will underlie the investigation in chapters three and four.

Chapter three begins by considering both the approximate time period in which spirituals, blues, and jazz, the three basic strands of Afro-American music, developed and the general design of song strategies contained within those periods.

¹John W. Work, American Negro Songs and Spirituals, p. 191.

Turning then to spirituals and examining them from historical context, I will discuss the rhetorical perspective from which these songs are viewed. Such a perspective is important because spirituals, much like any aspect of the black experience, have been misunderstood and generally misinterpreted because of stereotypes attached to the music. Finally, included in this chapter will be an analysis of numerous themes found in spirituals which deal with rhetorical problems and issues faced by black Americans.

Time Context: General Design of Afro-American Song Strategies

Ethnomusicologist Alain Locke in his book The Negro and His Music provides a justification for viewing Afro-American music in time contexts. According to Locke, Afro-American music developed into three basic strands or types which can be categorized into specific time periods. The types are folk, popular and classical.² Locke's analysis of time periods and the music which was created is categorized into seven overlapping periods. These periods and their approximate dates as seen by Locke are:

²Alain Locke, The Negro and His Music, (New York: The Arno Press, 1969), pp. 8-14. The terms folk, popular and classical are synonymous to what is referred to in this study as spirituals, blues and jazz.

- Before 1830 - 1. The Age of Plantation Shout and "Breakdown." Dominated by African Reminiscences and Survivals.
- 1830-1850 2. The Age of the Sorrow Songs: The Classic Folk Period: The Great Spirituals and the Folk Ballads.
- 1850-1875 3. The First Age of Minstrelsy: Stephen Foster and the Sentimental Ballad.
- 1875-1895 4. The Second Age of Minstrelsy: Farce and Buffoonery; - The "Buck and Wing," "The Coon Song," the "Folk Blues."
- 1895-1918 5. The Age of Ragtime: Vaudeville and Musical Comedy.
- 1918-1926 6. The Jazz Age: The Stomp, the Artificial Blues and Dance Comedy.
- 1926 to date 7. The Age of Classical Jazz: with the dawn of Classical Negro Music.³

A cursory examination of these seven overlapping periods reveal fertile insights into the history and musical abilities of black people. From Locke's chart we know that prior to 1830, during the period of the Plantation Songs, black music was generally dominated by reminiscences of African culture and survival. The chronicler Lydia Parrish, heard

³Ibid., p. 11. In addition to Locke's analysis, other ethnomusicologists seem to concur with Locke's approximate dates of Afro-American music development. See Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States, (New York: Cornell University Press), 1953. Maud-Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publisher), 1963. Lovell, John, "The Social Implications of the Negro Spirituals," Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 8 (October, 1939), pp. 634-643.

many of those early songs and recorded them in her work, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands.⁴

We know that spirituals seem to have started on their way many years before slavery died, and their heyday extended until shortly after the Civil War.⁵ The overlapping periods from 1850 and extending to 1926 show the Afro-American ballad, the blues and jazz as noticeably prominent music forms.

During all overlapping periods there must have been numerous rhetorical influences at work on Afro-American music. What was the exact nature of some of those influences? What dramatic changes did they cause? How were these influences reflected in song?

Using Locke's chart, and beginning with that musical genre called spirituals, this study will now address itself to those questions.

The Spirituals: A Neo-African Consideration

The genesis of Afro-American music is the spiritual.

⁴Lydia Parrish, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands.

⁵John Lovell Jr., "The Social Implications of the Negro Spirituals," Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 8 (October, 1939), p. 635.

Early spirituals fit H.E. Krehbiel's definition of a folk-song,

The song of the folk; not only the song admired of the people, but in a strict sense, the song created by the people. It is a body of poetry and music which has come into existence without the influence of conscious art, as a spontaneous utterance filled with characteristic expression of the feelings of a people.⁶

✓ Spirituals, the folksongs of black Americans, "are marked by certain peculiarities of rhythm, form and melody which are traceable, more or less clearly, to racial (or national) temperament, mode of life, climatic and political conditions, geographical environment and language."⁷ They were an integral element of the scene in which they developed; the rhetorical messages or comments they conveyed were intimately related to the life around them.

Functionally, early spirituals were interpretative reflections critical of matters common to the ante-bellum South. ✓ If we examine, for example, the song strategies of spirituals prior to 1865, we find that the key rhetorical influences at work on the Afro-American and the song strategies of his music were thoughts of African remembrance,

⁶ H.E. Krehbiel, Afro-American Folksongs, pp. 2-3.

⁷ Ibid.

freedom, and the effects of slavery. The "Sorrow Song," such as the one which prefaces chapter two, spoke the thoughts of black people in those infamous days when song served an integral part in the slave's means of communication. Early Afro-American songs presented critical descriptions of the slave's environment. These descriptions allowed the astute observer to glimpse the constricted reality and inner frustrations of enforced servitude. One such observer, in 1862, a Pennsylvania minister named James M. McKin, commented after hearing slave music,

They tell the whole story of these people's life and character. There is no need after hearing them to inquire into the history of the slave's treatment.⁸

The classical song "No More Auction Block" supports McKin's observation. This song, because of the "auction block" itself, "the peck of corn," "the pint of salt" and "the driver's lash," perhaps more than any other, reflected the thinking of Afro-Americans and their rhetorical criticisms prior to 1865.

⁸Bruce Jackson, ed., The Negro and His Folklore in Ninetenth-Century Periodicals, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 59.

No More Auction Block

No more auction block for me,
No more, no more,
No more auction block for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more peck of corn for me,
No more, no more,
No more peck of corn for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more pint of salt for me,
No more, no more,
No more pint of salt for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, no more,
No more driver's lash for me,
Many thousand gone.⁹

Integrally related to the scene in which they developed, early Afro-American spirituals were also the omnibus which carried forward the entire African cult.¹⁰ Early spirituals represent African culture. Janheinz Jahn, referring to the transfusion of culture in his book Neo-African Literature, wrote,

the slaves shipped to America had indeed lost their native languages in the United States. But they

⁹Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, "No More Auction Block," The Book of Negro Folklore, p. 441.

¹⁰Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Songs in the United States, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 15.

retained their philosophy of life, their religious practices, their form of poetry, song and dancing. They absorbed their new environment within the framework of their own ideas and principles.¹¹

White slave masters, abolitionist and those who accepted the planter ideology propagated after the slaves were freed saw the songs of these Afro-Americans as naive expressions of childish carefree happiness. The abolitionists saw slaves as helpless creatures suffering patiently under slavery. These same abolitionists viewed black music as the songs of those who sang in plaintive numbers designed to arouse pity.¹²

Both groups of white Americans ignored the fact that African slaves knew little of song and dance as Western expressions of personal pleasure. Both groups continuously ignored spiritual music creations as expressions of African culture. "The Negro in America," writes James Weldon Johnson, "had his own native musical endowment to begin with; and spirituals possess the fundamental characteristics of Afri-

¹¹Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, pp. 155-156. Eileen Southern, In a speech presented at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, February 24, 1972, stated early Afro-Americans kept alive the African memory of music and dance in an attempt to preserve their African heritage.

¹²Ibid., p. 156.

can music."¹³

While disregarding any intelligent consideration that might imply black Americans were products of their own highly complex culture, abolitionist and slave owners tried to superimpose white values and white cultural norms on blacks while simultaneously interpreting whatever blacks did in terms of Western significance. Spirituals subjected to this type of interpretation were completely misunderstood.

Christianity further compounded the misinterpretation of spirituals because Christianity as understood by blacks was not the same for many whites. Blacks modified Christianity to make it amenable to African religious concepts. The result was a body of songs voicing two distinct ideas. First, spirituals voiced all the cardinal virtues of Christianity (long suffering, forbearance, faith, hope, and charity). Second, spirituals voiced African cultural philosophy.

White Americans, whether by deliberate design, pure insensitivity, or some other reason, failed to consider the possibility that the spirit of Christianity could be fused

¹³James Weldon Johnson, "Negro Folk Songs and Spirituals," The Mentor, Vol. 17, (February 1929), p. 50.

by music into vestiges of the African past. Whites also failed to recognize that the adaptability of music lends itself to a variety of uses that include rhetoric and the transmission of culture.

Afro-Americans, partly because of the situation in which they found themselves and partly because they brought their native endowments to America with them, were quick to perceive the uses to which they could employ both music and Christianity. In fact, the ease with which Afro-Americans accomplished the fusion of Christian and African eschatology is not difficult to conceptualize. First, the African brought to America was by nature a "religious vessel" susceptible to religious influences.¹⁴ Second, Christianity appeared for the Afro-American at a precise psychological moment.

At the psychic moment, there was at hand the precise religion for the condition in which he found himself thrust. Far from his native land and customs, despised by those among whom he lived, experiencing the pang of the separation of loved ones, knowing the hard lot of the slave, the Negro seized Christianity, the religion of compensations in the life to come for the ills suffered in the present existence, the religion that implied the hope that, in the next world,

¹⁴Maya Angelou, from a lecture given at the University of Kansas, October 29, 1970.

there would be a change in conditions, and that he would be freed from the chains of bondage.¹⁵

Taking the analysis of religious fusion one step further, Jahn contends,

the Christian concept of death and resurrection and the African idea are not all that far removed from each other. So the latter could be expressed through the former; and conversely bits of Christian estchatology were absorbed into African religious concepts.¹⁶

✓Spirituals as a music genre reflect the impingement of two cultures of entirely different spiritual and physical backgrounds. The interpretation of spirituals is closely linked with this reflection. It follows, therefore, that spirituals, to be completely understood, must be scrutinized from the social and cultural matrix in which they developed. Emphasis must be placed on African cultural philosophy and on the counter-influence of Western Culture. Traditional stereotyped views of spirituals projected by post civil war and antebellum writers which have tended to ignore African cultural contributions should be re-examined with African concepts in mind.

¹⁵James W. Johnson, Negro Folk Songs and Spirituals, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶Janheiz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, pp. 156-57.

Several Views of
Afro-American Music*

I. TRADITIONAL VIEW:

<u>Perceived Situational Reality of Black Man in America</u>	<u>Reflected in Spirituals</u>	<u>Results</u>
1. Victim	1. Sad Songs speaking of lost freedom designed to arouse pity.	1. Black Abolitionist saw spirituals as laments sung by people in enforced servitude. After 1865 many blacks would dislike the songs because they bespeak stereotypes they would rather forget.
2. Hopeless		
3. Suffering		
4. Patient		
5. Docile and Contented	2. Gleeful, happy songs bespeaking childish simplicity.	2. Pro-Slavery advocates preferred this stereotyped interpretation.
6. Childlike, Naive, Happy and Carefree		

II. NEO-AFRICAN VIEW:

<u>Perceived Situational Reality of Black Man in America</u>	<u>Reflected in Spirituals</u>	<u>Results</u>
1. Afro-Americans brought philosophy, religious concepts, poetry, song and dance.	1. Early songs recorded historical events, many were sung with African words.	1. Negroes loved Africa, and their music, though tinged with Western Christian ideas, reflected African reminiscences.
2. Slavery viewed as an initiation period related to rites of passage	2. Absorbed Anglo-American material.	2. Spirituals are neither joyful nor sad, but a means of conjuring up joy (magara), compelling into existence liberation and salvation through ecstasy (word magic).

Con'd:

Perceived Situational---Reflected in----Results
Reality of Black Man Spirituals
In America

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| 3. Blacks systemati-
cally denied
access to con-
ventional com-
munication channels. | 3. Protest in
disguise. | 3. Many whites prefer
to ignore protest
elements in
spirituals and
prefer meanings
which bespeaks
happy docile,
harmless nigger. |
|--|----------------------------|---|

*Adapted from a presentation by Horace Mann Bond who taught "The Rhetoric of Black American's" at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1971.

The above chart (pp. 50-51) illustrates two ways of viewing spirituals. The first view is traditional in its approach to the explication of spirituals. The second view attempts to integrate the counter influence of African and Western culture. An investigation of this view reveals some inherent discrepancies in the traditional approach to understanding the meaning of spirituals. Foremost among these discrepancies is the tendency of traditionalists to stereotype blacks and their music on the basis of the unique situation from which Anglo-Americans saw blacks. Secondly, the interpretations of spirituals are forced by the second view from the strictly narrow traditional confines of social commentary songs, i.e., pretest, laments, etc., into the larger domain of things historically African and Western. Finally an investigation of the second view explodes the myth of the inept and docile slave. The slaves, recognizing discrepancies in the traditionalist view and using spirituals in a variety of ways which included rhetorical discourse and the furtherance of things distinctly African, were certainly not inept and docile.

Analysis of Religious Themes Contained in Spirituals

Different settings, different local histories, and different social situations create varying themes in spiritual music. As for the main body of music, a large number of themes

naturally project Christian concepts of faith, love, and humility, with considerable emphasis placed on salvation. Many of the songs restating events and stories recorded in the Old and New Testament may be arranged chronologically into an oral version of the Bible. The religious themes deserve careful consideration because it was through them that apocalyptic images and rhetorical messages were sent and received. Biblical and symbolic language which characterize religious themes hid the slave's intent to exhort one another to escape tyrannical masters. "Bound to Go," a song with special meanings when an escape plot was in the air, illustrates a kind of dual symbolism found in many slave spirituals.

Jordan River, I'm bound to go,
 Bound to go, bound to go,-
 Jordan River, I'm bound to go,
 And bid 'em fare ye well.

My Brudder Robert, I'm bound to go,
 Bound to go, bound to go,-
 My Brudder Robert, I'm bound to go,
 And bid 'em fare ye well.

My Sister Lucy, I'm bound to go,
 Bound to go, bound to go,-
 My Sister Lucy, I'm bound to go,
 And bid 'em fare ye well.¹⁷

Once a slave made his escape, his direction of travel led him toward the Big Dipper. The Big Dipper, traditionally

¹⁷Colonel Thomas W. Higginson, "Negro Spirituals," p. 686.

referred to in black music as the Drinkin' Gourd, always pointed northward to freedom. Therefore, to the fugitive slave these song lyrics had a special relevance.

Follow the drinkin' gourd, Follow the drinkin' gourd.
For the old man is awaitin' for to
carry you to freedom
If you follow the drinkin' gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the drinkin' gourd,
For the old man is awaitin' for to
carry you to freedom
If you follow the drinkin' gourd.¹⁸

In telling the story of Blind Barnabas, one spiritual said,

Oh de blind man stood on de' road an' cried
Cried, Lord, oh Lord, save a-po 'me!¹⁹

Down through the dark years of slavery, the cry of Blind Barnabas must have pierced the souls of black folk. While Barnabas spoke of one reality, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" spoke of another.

Oh, nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus.
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
Glory, Hallelujah!

¹⁸Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans, p. 131.

¹⁹Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expressions," p. 48.

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down,
 Oh, yes, Lord!
 Sometimes I'm almost to the ground,
 Oh, yes Lord!
 Although you see me going along, so,
 Oh, yes Lord!
 I have my troubles here below,
 Oh, yes, Lord!

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
 Nobody knows my sorrow,
 Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
 Glory, Hallelujah!²⁰

References to trouble are numerous in slave spirituals. Brown says, such references are "poignant rather than perfunctory springing from a deep need, not from an article of faith."²¹ Such lines as,

Dey whupped him up de hill . . .
 Dey crowned his head with thorns . . .
 Dey pierced him in de side,
 An' de blood came a-twinklin' down;
 But he never said a mumbalin' word,
 Not a werd; not a word,²²

must reflect the slaves' crystal look at the tragic situation in which he found himself. In dealing with that situation the slave shouted,

²⁰Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, ed., Book of Negro Folklore, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1958), pp. 293-294.

²¹Ibid. p. 287.

²²Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expressions," p.48.

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egyptland
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go!²³

and sang,

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord; I want to cross over
into camp ground.

O, don't you want to go to that gospel
feast,
That promised land where all is peace?

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord; I want to cross over
into camp ground.²⁴

"Deep River" actually originated in Guilford County, North Carolina between 1816-1831 where it was the name of both a body of water and of a meetinghouse of Quakers.²⁵ According to Fisher, "A conservative slave told his Quaker benefactor that he wanted to cross over to Africa, the home of camp meetings."²⁶

There are, of course, spiritual themes filled with Magara (joy), but the Magara of the spirituals is a joy of

²³Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, ed., Book of Negro Folklore, p. 292.

²⁴Ibid. p. 297.

²⁵"Quakers in North Carolina brought numerous slaves and through their Manumission Society, which was established on July 19, 1816, sent them to other countries." Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States, p. 41.

²⁶Ibid.

liberation and salvation the slave conjured through the use of words (Nommo) sung and danced. The function of singing and dancing invoke the spiritual and psychological contents of the songs. Thus joyous songs transposed blacks from states in which they found themselves to states in which they transcended this life.

An analysis of joy themes show some are closely linked to the happiness manumitted slaves felt when they were going back to Africa, and to the innate desire of many early Afro-Americans to return to the motherland. Although traditionalists frequently overlooked these facts, it is now commonly known that no matter how roseate slave life had become under a distinct few "benevolent masters," slaves were forced to work in the rain and in the burning sun for long hours. Families were broken up by the slave system and preferential treatment of house and field slaves was often based on the misgenation practices of slave owners. Many slaves, looking toward escape from these conditions and wondering if they would ever be free to go sailing to the Promised Land, could imagine a joy in returning to Africa. Their thoughtful preoccupation with Africa is preserved in "Ship of Zion" spirituals similar to this one in which a North Carolina slave asks,

Don't you see that ship a-sailin'
 a-sailin', a-sailin',
 Don't you see that ship a-sailin'
 Gwine over to the Promised-Land?

I asked my Lord, shall I ever be the one,
Shall I ever be the one, shall I ever be the one,
To go sailin', sailin', sailin'
Gwine over to the Promised-Land?²⁷

It seems no matter what the subject - Africa, joy, escape, protest or shared religious beliefs - all themes found in spirituals relate to the life situation in which Afro-Americans found themselves. Originators of themes found in early spirituals euphoniously illuminated the history of black people by voicing impressions of real occurrences.

²⁷Ibid. p. 61.

Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul¹

Chapter IV

Introduction

Locke's analysis of the development of early spirituals indicates the wide extent to which these songs were peculiarly adapted by African-Americans for dealing with the system of chattel slavery. The slaves registered their dissatisfaction with this system and provided avenues of relief for themselves from its rigors. More subtle forms of activity included intentional preservation of African cultural philosophy as a direct response to Western culture.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, the popularity of spirituals began to decline. Locke tells us that after 1875 spirituals were still being made, but that the age of plantation music was over.² What happened to black music after 1865? What new forms did music take once the heyday of spirituals was over?

¹Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues," poem in the Negro Caravan, ed. by Sterling Brown, p. 368.

²It is important to note that Locke is not suggesting that folk spirituals are no longer being created. His time chart indicates the periods in which the greatest number of these songs were initially sung in close approximation of their original form.

This chapter seeks answers to those questions. The chapter begins with an investigation of song strategies in black music from 1865-1895 and then turns to an examination of the specific musical forms prominent during this period.

Song Strategies from 1865-1895

With the advent of the Civil War and the dismal period of Reconstruction that followed, "plantation music and slavery were so interwoven in the minds of the new generation that it was difficult to dissociate them."³ The spirituals, early seculars and ballads continued to be sung. The thematic material and song strategies, however, begin to deal almost exclusively, in the primary forms of spirituals and ballads, with freedom. In one song expressing the former slave's present preoccupation with freedom, the newly freed Afro-American sang:

Slavery chain done broke at last, broke
 at last, broke at last,
 Slavery chain done broke at last,
 Going to praise God till I die.

Way down in a dat valley,
 Praying on my knees;
 Told God about my troubles,
 And to help me if-a He please.

³Max Margulis, "The Duality of Bygone Jazz," Massachusetts Review, Vol. 2, (Spring, 1961), p. 387.

I did tell him how I suffer,
 In de dungeon and de chain,
 And de days I went with head bowed down,
 And my broken flesh in pain.

I did know my Jesus heard me,
 Cause de spirit spoke to me,
 And said, "Rise my child, your chillun,
 And you too shall be free.

Slavery chain done broke at last, broke at last,
 broke at last,
 Slavery chain done broke at last,
 Going to praise God till I die.⁴

Other songs shouted "O Freedom; O Freedom; And before I'll be
 a slave, I'll be buried in my grave! And go home to my Lord
 and be free."⁵

It seems the emancipation of the Afro-American proposed
 for him a new kind of influence on his music. Besides free-
 dom, most noticeable among these influences was the beginning
 of Reconstruction. Briefly, under the early influences of
 Reconstruction, the rhetorical strategies which dissimulated
 the meaning of ante-bellum songs began to lessen.

Emancipation also proposed for the Afro-American a new
 kind of existence. For the first time the newly emancipated
 slave was able to enjoy something of a novelty - leisure
 time. He was able to travel freely and control his personal
 life as he saw fit. This leisure time, combined with new

⁴ Sterling Brown, ed., The Negro Caravan, pp. 440-441.

⁵ Sterling Brown, "Negro Folk Expression," p. 49.

privilege and responsibilities resulting from the former slaves changed condition, reflected itself as an important catalyst in the next forms of Afro-American music, minstrelsy and blues.

Concerning Negro Minstrelsy, we know that it was first practiced by plantation groups of gifted slaves to entertain slave masters and their guest. This kind of Negro entertainment was not infrequent in either the North or the South. Gifted black performers usually derived material benefits in the form of clothes or light work loads for successful performances. In the slave narratives documented by Harvey Wish, one slave, Solomon Northup, speaks of black entertainment as a means of securing special privilege.

Alas! had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses-relieved me of many days' labor in the field-supplied me with conveniences for my cabin-with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes, and oftentimes led me away from the presence of a hard master, to witness scenes of jollity and mirth.⁶

√ This form of privilege securement was itself a strategy to insure survival as gifted slaves were always highly prized.

Negro minstrelsy which came to the American stage was an imitation of gifted black performers. The most well re-

⁶Harvey Wish, ed., Slavery in the South, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), p. 53.

ceived of these imitations were done by whites who began their comic Negro Impersonations as "black-face" acts before 1830.⁷ By 1875 black-face acts had developed into the first age of Negro Minstrelsy. As practiced, the strategy of this black faced minstrelsy was to draw ridiculous caricatures of the newly emancipated slave, and was a white travesty on, rather than a black simulacrum of, the Afro-American and his music. The cogent assessment made by John Mason Brown in 1868 provides an excellent analysis of the white minstrel music. In Brown's words,

A very erroneous idea has long prevailed which accepts "Negro Minstrelsy" as a mirror of the musical taste and feeling of the Negro race in the United States. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Beyond the external resemblance, due to burnt cork, there is in Negro minstrelsy scarcely a feature of person, music, dialect or action that recalls, with any dramatic accuracy, the genuine Negro Slave of former years. True it is that Christy, Bryant and Newcomb have achieved great success as Ethiopian comedians, and are accepted as interpreters of the Negro; but it is none the less true that their delineations are mere conventionalisms, and their

⁷Alain Locke, The Negro and His Music, pp. 43-44. The first scene in this drama of the crossing of culture, or, as the cynic might put it, the theft of black magic by whites, was played in 1828 in Pittsburgh. The old vaudevillian, Daddy Rice, was weary of the Irish-American songs in his act and he could see his audience was bored with them as well. One day down by the Ohio River front, he saw a ragged Negro roustabout amusing himself by dancing, soft-shoe style, to his own song . . .

Turn about and wheel about and do just so,
And everytime I wheel about I jump Jim Crow . . .

See: Alan Lomax, The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language, (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 80-81.

Ethiopian music even farther from the truth than their very amusing but very inaccurate impersonation.⁸

While minstrel music was going its separate course, another form of black music was being developed. This music, stemming from spirituals, ballads, worksongs and slave seculars was genuinely expressive of the Afro-American. The music of course was blues, and "the blues," Charles Keil tells us, "exist because some men feel called upon to address themselves to certain basic problems in song and because these songs meet a cultural demand."⁹

Song Strategies in Blues After 1865

The South did not change drastically after the Civil War, and the slave songs, when it became apparent that Reconstruction would fail, needed only to make slight adjustments in blues to express more overtly the feelings of black people. In fact, the effects of the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction contributed to the exigences out of which blues would emerge as a prominent music genre. The most far reaching of these effects on blacks and ultimately their music were the following:

⁸Bruce Jackson, ed., The Negro and His Folklore, pp. 110-111.

⁹Charles Keil, Urban Blues, p. 70.

1. The war dispersed Afro-Americans, thereby causing a social migration of blacks into urban centers.¹⁰ These blacks were in need of employment and economic security. In both the North and the South, the opportunity to satisfy these needs were systematically denied to most blacks.
2. Failure to meet the needs of blacks through Reconstruction left them in vulnerable social positions in both the North and the South. Newly freed they were faced with rhetorical questions similar to the one which follows: How was the black man expected to contend with Jim Crow laws, recalcitrant racism, de jure segregation and their accompaniments of social inequities?
3. Reconstruction, after having failed to meet the needs of black people, became indicative of the way whites would respond to minority groups for many years following the Civil War.¹¹

The post-bellum thinking of Afro-Americans concerning these major problems was reflected in the blues. Folklore

¹⁰Bryan Fulks, Black Struggle, pp. 147-148.

¹¹"A decade after the Civil War it was clear that Reconstruction had failed and by 1877 the last troupes quit the Louisiana state house and the great experiment was at an end. In 1883 the Supreme Court declared the Fourteenth Amendment was unconstitutional and deprived the Negro of appeal in law. In 1890 Mississippi made it constitutional to disfranchise the Negro; Louisiana and Carolina followed in 1895. In the space of the next fifteen years more southern states had adopted new constitutions specifically aimed at limiting the Negro's power, and other states made similar statutory provisions."
Paul Oliver, The Story of Blues (Great Britain: Design Year-book Limited, 1969), p. 14.

historian Richard Dorson noted that many blues songs during this period, in voicing the black man's complaint against Jim Crow, echoed one basic thought:

Ought's a' ought and a figure's a figur'
All for the white folks and none for the nigger.¹²

Since blues dominate the music involvement of Afro-Americans shortly after the Civil War and Reconstruction, it will be profitable to continue this investigation by examining both blues and other related music forms of this period. First, a preliminary discussion will consider the rhetorical function of blues and clarify these functions in relation to spirituals. Second, I will examine other Afro-American folk music forms, the ballad and worksongs. Third, I will examine representative blues texts and analyze these texts according to the rhetorical function of the music.

Nature of the Blues

Blues are often thought of as white songs sung by blacks, but in reality they are a mixture of African and European music based on the African scheme of "statement and response."¹³ The textual and musical structure of blues stem

¹²Richard M. Dorson, America Folklore, p. 182.

¹³Jahnheinz Jahn, Muntu, p. 221. Statement and response refers to the basic four line AAAB or three line AAB patterns in which the first lines are statements and the last line is a response.

from the Afro-American ballad which continued the tradition of the African fable. Musically blues are a reversal of African drum tradition. In Africa, drums lead the singer's performance so the song accompanies the drums. In blues instruments are added. They are accompaniments and the singing or vocalization remains the important feature of the song. LeRoi Jones, prominent Afro-American cultural critic, in his book Black Music, claims the call and response form of African music (Lead and Chorus) has never left us as a mode of musical expression.¹⁴ It has come down both as vocal and instrumental form which bespeaks the direct relationship between Afro-American music and the African past.

African music while characterized by statement and response is intimately interwoven into the activities of daily life. In traditional African societies,

Music is one of the means by which cultural traditions are passed on from one generation to another. Through music, old men and women voice their philosophical attitudes and indoctrinate the young with the principles to which they should adhere. Through music, legends of history are transmitted, warriors are initiated to fight.¹⁵

Blues music, like its African antecedent, is functionally involved with activities of daily living. Blues transmit

¹⁴LeRoi Jones, Black Music, p. 181.

¹⁵Phyl Garland, The Sound of Soul, p. 44.

Afro-American philosophical statements and attitudes. In this respect blues share affinity with spirituals, but whereas spirituals under conditions of slavery invariably spoke with double meanings in conscious attempts to deceive overseers and slave masters, blues is a nondeceptive talking music. Rhetorically, blues is a talking music spoken intraculturally by blacks to create:

1. human responses to tragic problems,
2. community oneness through shared experience, and
3. strong poetic confrontations with reality through song.

As human responses to tragic problems blues are instructive and epigrammatic. They are not something the Afro-American listens to or looks at for the music's sake. They are something to be done. S.I. Hayakawa, regarding the epigrammatic flavor in the words of blues, contends,

I am often reminded by the words of blues songs of Kenneth Burke's famous description of poetry as 'equipment for living.' In the form in which they developed in Negro communities, the blues are equipment for living humble . . . and precarious lives of low social status or no status at all -- nevertheless, they are vital equipment.¹⁶

The blues do indeed provide responses to problems confronting Afro-Americans. They capture in musical form what

¹⁶S.I. Hayakawa, ed., The Use and Misuse of Language, (Connecticut: Fawcett Publishing Company, 1964), p. 160.

may be described as modes of reacting and dealing with reality. Harold Courlander in his comprehensive study, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., says,

The blues is a genre utilized to express personal dissatisfaction, remorse, or regret; to tell the world about your misfortune and the way you feel about it; to air scandal, and sometimes to point the finger of accusation at someone who has caused an injury or misery.¹⁷

Penetrating the intracultural core of all blues is the overpowering sense of community oneness through shared experience. Blues, unlike early spirituals which were sung by groups for individuals, are sung by single persons for the group. The song expresses the feelings and ideas of the singer's experiences in an idiom fundamentally recognizable to the audience as theirs. It can be said, because of the commonality of the black experience, the blues singer expressing his personal experiences is in fact, expressing the experiences of the community, making himself the spokesman.

His blues is echoed in the hearts of his unknown listeners. The appeal of the blues and the love and warmth of affection in which the blues singer are held by so many of their fellow Afro-Americans lies in this feeling of kinship. It is not that the singers are racial spokesmen from the militant gestures, . . . it is simply that in singing for himself the blues artist

¹⁷Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., p. 128.

also sings for them.¹⁸

The noted Afro-American author Ralph Ellison feels that blues express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering life through sheer toughness of spirit.¹⁹ It follows, therefore, that blues represent in lyrical form poetic confrontations with reality; that is, the painful episodes in ones life are dealt with in blues through near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. The blues singer, instead of being desposed to sing himself away from a world of sorrow and trouble, sings himself and his troubles through the world.

Development of Related Forms of Afro-American Blues

To farther understand the historical nature of blues, and to evaluate blues as a rhetorical medium, it will be necessary to briefly examine other Afro-American folk music forms.²⁰

¹⁸Paul Oliver, Blues Fell This Morning, (London: Cassell and Company LTD, 1960), p. 299.

¹⁹Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act, (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 78.

²⁰The blues is, ofcourse only one of several vocal forms in the Negro culture apart from the specific songs of spiritual, gospel and ballad. The narrative and folk tales, the telling of 'lies' or competitive 'tall tales' the healthily obscene 'putting in the dozens', the long and witty 'toasts' and the epigrammatic rhyming couplets which enliven the conversation of folk Negro and Harlem hipster alike, have their reflections in the blues. They are evident in the earth vulgarity, the unexpected and paradoxical images, the appeal of unlikely metaphors the endless story that makes all blues one, the personification of blues and the lines or rhyming iambic pentameters.

Paul Oliver, Conversation with the Blues, (London: Cassell and Company LTD, 1960), pp. 8-9.

The musical forms to be considered here are ballads and work-songs. What will be demonstrated is that ballads, worksongs and blues, like all Afro-American music are not mutually exclusive but logical progressions and extensions of one another.

In ballads and worksongs, one sees folk idioms in both text and music. Throughout both musical genres there is an incidence of social criticism, ridicule, gossip and protest. The "designative meanings" whether stated directly or metaphorically can be personal or impersonal.²¹

Turning to the ballad, Courlander tells us, it "is a song which tells a story and which is made up of a series of stanzas (more or less regular), with or without refrain. There is a progressive, usually chronological development in the narration."²² Afro-American ballads use as their subject matter the exploits of folk heroes, characters larger than life whose abilities could not be challenged by ordinary men.²³ One of the many versions of "John Henry" serves as a representation of this type of music.

²¹"Designative Meaning" is the story the music allegedly tells and moods it elicits. Paul R. Farnsworth, The Social Psychology of Music, p. 71.

²²Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., p. 76.

²³Paul Oliver, Blues Fell This Morning, p. 295.

John Henry said to his captain,
 "A man ain't nothin' but a man,
 But before I'll let dat steam drill beat me down
 I'll die wid my hammer in my hand,
 Die wid my hammer in my hand."²⁴

The classic Afro-American ballads follow the statement and response pattern of blues. The significant influence of ballads on blues was suggested in the previous discussion concerning the "Nature of the Blues." Here, it was pointed out that blues share a close affinity with ballads, and that Afro-American ballads from a textual and musical structure stem from African traditions. One of the best example of Afro-American ballads is "De ballit of De Boll Weevil."

De fus^o time I saw de Boll Weevil
 He wuz settin^o on de square,
 De nex^o time I saw de Boll Weevil
 He had all his family dere--
 Dey's lookin' for a home,
 Jes a-lookin' for a home. . . .

De Farmer took de Boll Weevil
 An^o buried him in hot san^o;
 De Boll Weevil say to de Farmer,
 "I'll stan^o it like a man,
 Fur it is my home,
 It is my home."

Den de Farmer took de Boll Weevil
 An^o lef^o him on de ice;
 Say de Boll Weevil to de Farmer
 "Dis is mighty cool an' nice.
 Oh, it is my home,
 It is my home."

²⁴Sterling Brown, ed., Negro Caravan, p. 471.

Mr. Farmer took little Weevil
 And put him in Paris Green;
 "Thank you, Mr. Farmer;
 It's the best I ever seen.
 It is my home,
 It's jest my home."²⁵

Rhetorically two elements in Afro-American ballads are obvious. The two examples present classic illustrations of both elements. First, in the Boll Weevil ballad there is the obvious element of protest symbolized in the tenacity of the Boll Weevil's refusal to be annihilated by events or circumstances. This is true to a lesser extent in the John Henry ballad. Second, in both ballads there is the conscious attempt to maintain cultural norms. John Henry reminds us that although a man is nothing but a man, he must be that at all cost while "The Boll Weevil" tells us that we are a hardy people uniquely capable of surviving hardships. These elements, as we shall subsequently see, are reiterated in blues songs.

A different type of song, closely associated with ballads and blues, is the worksong.

Ethnomusicologist A. Grace Mims claims worksongs are an earlier form of blues.²⁶ Whether one agrees or disagrees

²⁵Ibid., pp. 458-459.

²⁶A. Grace Mims, "Soul, The Black Man and His Music", p. 142.

with Mims assessment, worksongs are part of the fiber from which many blues songs are taken. ✓ The Afro-American work-song is a song which combines the rhythmic use of tools, the sense of community, and responsive singing with mutual problems and common enterprise. Historically it is a natural result of men and women working in groups.²⁷ Disceren and Fine cite four common characteristics of worksongs which are applicable to the rhetoric of Afro-American music.

They are:

1. Through rhythm they facilitate the synchronous expenditure of energy by individuals engaged in a common task and thus economize energy.
2. Through song content they spur the workers on through jest, abuse or reference in the songs to the spectator's opinions.
3. They state many opinions of the workman concerning the work, and
4. They inform employers and the general public of the workers' wishes and aspirations.²⁸

Although "few worksongs are sung today, there are many blues songs that illustrate the current Afro-American attitude toward work and working conditions."²⁹

²⁷Courlander points out significant similarities between Afro-American worksongs and African singing tradition in Negro Folk Music, pp. 91-92.

²⁸Disceren and Fine, A Psychology of Music, p. 208.

²⁹Ralph H. Metcalfe, Jr., "The Western Roots of Afro-American Music," p. 19.

The formative influence of worksongs on blues has been in structure and mode of expression. The structural pattern of solo line and unison group response is characterized in blues by traditional statement and response. The structural pattern of worksongs, like that for blues, function in much the same way.

In worksongs, the capacity to create and respond emotionally to shared patterns of tone and rhythm contribute to conveyance of meaning and psychological understanding. The mode of expression is always delivered as a projection of the singer's feelings displayed through rhymic movement and musical force. Consider the following example in which the group leader sings the main stanza.

Leader	I'm a minder I'm a minder In de col' ground.
Response	Lawd, Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!
Leader	I'm a minder I'm a minder In de col' ground.
Response	Lawd, Lawd, Lawd, Lawd! ³⁰

In the following version of the "hammer worksong," the mode of

³⁰Dorothy Scarborough, On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 216.

musical expression is again delivered by sheer musical force.³¹

If I had 'bout - fo-ty-five dallahs-
 All in gol', yas - all in gol'-
 I'd be rich as - ol' man cahtah-
 Wealth untol', yas - wealth untol'.

Dis ol' hammah - kill John Henry-
 Kill him daid yas - kill him daid-
 Knock de brains out - of mah pahdner-
 In his haid, yas - in his haid.

I'm gwine back to - South Ca'lina-
 Fah away yas - fah away.-
 I'm gwine to see my - Esmeraldy-
 I cain't stay, no - I cain't stay.³²

The worksong, like blues, is capable of conveying feelings and emotional meanings which are not merely individual and personal, but which may be shared alike by the composer, performer, and all sensitive listeners. As Disceren and Fine point out, singers state opinions, wishes, and aspirations through song content and sheer musical force.

Blues Text

When the oral texts of blues songs are examined, they

³¹The term hammer worksong refers generally to those songs sung by Afro-Americans working on the roads, in a quarry, or some work of that sort. The workers all lift their picks or hammers together, singing, and come down together, letting their breath out in unison with a sort of long grunt. Dashes are used here to indicate the grunts.

³²Dorothy Scarborough, On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs, p. 219.

reveal the deepest expression of racial memory. It is a racial memory in which the blues singer recalls personal triumphs and disasters, flooded farmlands and blighted crops, love betrayed and lover's parted, the black man's poverty and the white man's justice - vague dissatisfaction and romantic longings for other people, other places and other times.³³

It is the racial memory evident in blues which makes blues songs an effective instrument of rhetorical persuasion. Like Afro-American spirituals, the metaphors and analogies drawn are esoteric to black people. Images thus created in blues suggest figuratively or literally the total, external and internal environment of Afro-Americans. These images when manipulated by skillful blues rhetoricians persuade black audiences to create responses appropriate to the expressive functions of the music. These functions reiterated are:

1. human responses to tragic problems,
2. community through shared experience, and
3. poetic confrontation with reality.

In an early representation of Afro-American blues songs, "She's My Mary," the expressive qualities in blues is demonstrated.

³³Robert Bone, Anger and Beyond, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 91-92.

My friends all scorn us, talk all over town,
 They try to make trouble for us, the news is
 out all around,
 But after all she's still my Mary, and will
 be until the deal goes down.

She was my Mary, when this whole world turned
 me down,
 She was my father, mother, sister, brother;
 she helped me carry on.
 And she will still be my Mary, when everything
 goes wrong.

She's so sweet to me when everything goes wrong;
 She's so consolation; she helps me to carry on
 That't why I know she'll still be my Mary, when
 This rotten deal goes down.

I know I can find a woman, each and every
 day that bright sun shine,
 I know I can find a woman, each and every
 day that bright sun shine,
 But after all she's still my Mary, and there's
 nothing else can ever change my mind.

People say I'm a fool, cause I don't git out and
 chase around,
 People say I'm a fool, cause I don't git out and
 chase around,
 I still can find the consolation that I need, and
 She'll still be my Mary, when the deal goes down.³⁴

Each lyric sets up a definite situation and presents an appropriate response pattern for that situation. In this song the response pattern remains the same as the singer repeats "She's My Mary." This repetition becomes the identifiable

³⁴Sterling Brown, ed., Negro Caravan, p. 478.

motif in the song. The motif has been altered in stanzas two and four to suggest slightly different situations. In those stanzas the singer states his relationship with Mary is unaffected by the immediate difficulty with which he is confronted. The "deal" (present difficulties) is not mentioned.

With respect to black audiences, most blues songs are instructive and epigrammatic. They have this quality because it is the nature of the blues genre to allow blues to speak to black people through "designative meaning," analogy, and metaphor. The designative meaning of "She's My Mary," for example, states unequivocally that if a man has a consistent woman who stands by him in both happy and difficult times, then he should be equally consistent and loyal. The analogies and metaphors drawn in phrases, such as the "deal going down," "friend's scorn," "when this world turned me down," and "she's consolation" create images to which black people can relate. In other words, the rhetorical effectiveness of the song is due to the commonality of the singer and his audience's experiences. The singer relates a series of situations in which he has found himself and then in epigrammatic fashion suggests the appropriate response(s) for meeting that situation.

The text of some blues songs reveal a convenient outlet against racial injustice.

Songs commenting on this subject are sometimes direct and bitter, sometimes gentle and tolerant, sometimes ironic. Occasionally they are in a humorous, playful mood in which the sting is several layers deep.³⁵

The following stanza from a song recorded by Courlander is an excellent illustration.

Cook's in the kitchen picking collard greens
Cook's in the kitchen picking collard greens
White folks in the parlor playing cards
and the cook got to pick 'em clean.³⁶

The salient comment made in "Me an My Capatin" is another example of this playful mood in which the real sting is several layers below the surface.

Got one mind for white folks to see;
'Nether for what I know is me;
He don't know, he don't know my mind,
When he see me laughing
Just laughing to keep from crying.³⁷

Quite frequently other themes in the Afro-American blues repertoire speak out on the "woman problem" or, conversely, the "man problem." In one recent such song recorded by Courlander, "I Got My Questionary," the singer

³⁵Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., p. 136.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Sterling Brown, ed., Negro Caravan, p. 471.

calls the audience attention to the predicament of military service by combining it with the problem of man, woman, and home.³⁸

Well I got my questionnaire
 And it leads me to the war
 Well I got my questionnaire
 And it leads me to the war
 Well I'm Leavin', pretty baby,
 Child, can't do anything at all.

Uncle Sam ain't no woman,
 But he sure can take your man.
 Uncle Sam ain't no woman,
 But he sure can take your man,
 Boys, they got 'em in the Service
 Doin' something I can't understand.³⁹

The oral texts of the songs examined suggest several important characteristics about Afro-American blues. Foremost among these characteristics is that every blues is a compilation of experience and emotion which needs an outlet. Second, as sung in their natural setting, these blues have a social significance; they have the rhetorical function of verbalizing personal feelings while calling community attention to the singers predicament or situation.

³⁸"In all the wars of the United States the Negro has expressed in song what he has not dared to utter as a discourse setting forth his opinions."
 Maud-Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, p. 265.

³⁹Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music U.S.A., p. 137.

Good mornin', blues,
Blues, how do you do?
Good mornin', blues,
Blues, how do you do?
Good morning, how are you?¹

Chapter V

Comparison and Constrasts of Historical Periods Covered

Actual historical examination of the overlapping periods contained within Locke's chart suggest a direct relationship between changes in Afro-American music and changes taking place in American society. Prior to 1830, for example, African concepts were heavily fused in black music. By 1850 through the process of acculturation brought on by time and situational realities confronting blacks, black music began introducing other concepts. Manumission or return to Africa, always a common theme, gave way to songs about freedom and the dehumanizing qualities of slavery. Before the decline of spiritual songs around 1875 slavery would have been dealt with extensively.

¹Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folklore. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1966), pp. 387-388.

Between 1850-1875 the Civil War and Reconstruction brought new kinds of influences to black music. In the primary form of worksongs, ballads, and blues, black music became concerned with the problems of freedmen. Echoes of Jim Crowism and the migration of blacks to large urban centers in the North would be reflected in songs after 1875. By 1895 the experiences of a whole race of people recently freed from bondage and now striving to become a part of mainstream America would have been musically recorded.

Throughout all of these periods external forces, such as economic and social conditions, affected the direction of song development. Slavery, it was pointed out, influenced many ante-bellum seculars and spirituals. Freedom, the Civil War, and Reconstruction influenced the word (NOMMO), content, and rhetorical strategies of all black music. In a similar fashion, natural events and the internal feelings which accompany those events also had their effects on the development of black music.

Some Observations on the Rhetoric of Black Music

A study of the rhetoric of Afro-American music presents the following basic considerations for speech communication. First, music is one of the major vehicles used by Afro-

Americans to express comment, criticism, and protest. Second, social status, economic conditions, and external circumstances operating at any given time on Afro-Americans affect their music. Third, the property of music creation belongs to all Afro-Americans, i.e., the total black community is responsible for musical creations and the innovative changes in determining the use to which music is put. This shared property of music creation accounts for natural changes which occurs in the development of songs and explains the recurrence of particular themes. Fourth, since music in terms of social sanctions is one of the more legitimate outlets for expression - indeed, during various periods of black history, it has often seemed the only outlet - it follows that skillful rhetors have traditionally used music as a vanguard agent in the black liberation movement. Finally, the most striking feature of black music is its functional quality.

Whatever the Afro-American sang has tended to be intensely functional. Worksongs lightened the burden of forced labor. Early spirituals retained African religious symbolism and consoled black Americans during the physical torment and spiritual degradation brought on by slavery. Ballads recorded stories about important people or events.

Usually these stories carried over themes of daily experiences with the expressed purpose of being instructive and epigrammatic. Blues transmit Afro-American philosophical statements and attitudes. They capture in musical form what might be described as modes of reacting to and dealing with reality. It is the functional quality of black music that has made it one of the most effective instrument of rhetorical persuasion.

Problems Limiting This Study

Research possibilities for rhetorical studies in black music are vast. This vastness presents a problem because so much of what the Afro-American is is an expression of all his music. In limiting this study to spirituals and blues, other musical genres have been excluded which have had a great deal to say about Afro-Americans. Each genre (worksongs, shouts, ring songs, ballads, gospels, and instrumental jazz) has its own unique rhetorical functions and each is related developmentally to the history of black people in America.

The general contexts in which this study is placed covered the period 1830-1895. Within this period it is impossible to explicate all the significant influences

operative on black music. The rhetorical issues slavery, war, Reconstruction and freedom are more easily dealt with because of material available on these events. More subtle issues, such as the rebellion of Nat Turner, the underground railroad, and the idea of manumission are difficult to pinpoint because of the lack of available resources concerning these issues in song. Yet, in the period under consideration, they are very important events.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for the development of a speech methodology which concerns itself with a rhetorical analysis of folk music. Such a methodology should account for characteristic elements in music which are not only intrinsically persuasive, but which accounts for the effectiveness of specific musical genres in the promotion of certain ideas and beliefs held by a particular group.

A fascinating comparative study could be done on black and white minstrel music. Minstrel music, during the "First Age of Negro Minstrelsy," was characterized by stereotypes of blacks which were widely accepted. An investigation could seek to discover why this music achieved the prominence it attained, what effects it had on black Americans and the larger white audience to which it was addressed, the strategies or goals contained in the music, and the ways in which this

music was different from minstrel music which developed on the stage between 1875-1895.

Another productive approach would be to focus on the rhetorical appeal, persuasiveness, and symbolism in contemporary music. In this regard, rock music (a rhetorical kind of music in and of itself) is especially intriguing because it suggests attitudes about the man/woman relationship, the problems of ecology and pollution, and has a great deal to say about the use of drugs.

A final possible area of study communication scholars might address themselves to is a study of jazz.² Initial studies on jazz could parallel studies done on classical music investigated by Mursell in The Psychology of Music, and Farnsworth in The Social Psychology of Music.³ In part one of Mursell's book, for instance, Mursell is concerned with the psychology of musical functions. Listening, as one of these functions, is composed of several extrinsic and intrinsic factors which can be applied to jazz music. Farnsworth discusses the language aspect of music in chapter five of his Social Psychology of Music. He comes up with

²Such a study should concern itself with the effects of jazz on both the jazz rhetor and his audience and should go beyond mere identification of attitudes and feelings to an explication of themes inherent in the particular genre under consideration.

³Studies cited in these works deal exclusively with classic instrumental music. Jazz, it seems, would lend itself to classical kinds of analyses because of its instrumental nature.

an adjective list for classifying music and mentions variables which give meaning to music. A similiar checklist could be made for jazz music and a discovery of the variables which give jazz meaning could be investigated from a communication point of view.

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