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The purpose of this series is to encourage the development of biblical, historical, theological, ethical, and pastoral works that analyze the role of the churches and other religious movements in the liberation struggles of black women and men in the United States, particularly the poor, and their relationship to struggles in the Third World.

Named after Bishop Henry McNeal Turner (1843-1915) and Sojourner Truth (1797?-1883), the series reflects the spirit of these two visionaries and witnesses for the black struggle for liberation. Bishop Turner was a churchman, a political figure, a missionary, and a pan-Africanist. Sojourner Truth was an illiterate former slave who championed black emancipation, women's rights, and the liberating spirit of the gospel.
Justified, Sanctified, and Redeemed

Blessed Expectation in Black Women’s Blues and Gospels

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan

Prelude: Call to Worship

Justified, sanctified, and redeemed—what joys do these portend? African-American women live, compose, and sing spirituals, hymns, Gospels, and Blues. Sometimes they sing because they’re happy; sometimes they sing because they’re free; sometimes they sing from plain ol’ misery. Black women sing what they experience. Their songs, born of an African milieu, are tempered by the pain of evil, racism, and subjugation; and their songs reflect the joy, blessedness, and beauty of spirituality and survival. Black music, including Gospel and Blues, the younger sisters of the spirituals and work songs, offers responses to life. Black Gospels and Blues emerged when creative Black women and men blended their consciousness, visions, interpretative grasps of the Bible, glimmers of God’s grace, hopes for freedom and equality, and contemporary life experiences into a melodic potpourri of song.

I explore a message of hope, salvation, and transformation embodied within certain Gospels and Blues created and/or performed by African-American women. This scenario (1) contextualizes Black women as signifiers and gives working definitions of Blues music, hope, salvation, and transformation; (2) gives a brief biography, surveys the repertoire, messages, and performances of Blues singers, composers, and arrangers Ma Rainey, Alberta Hunter, and Tracy Chapman; (3) defines Gospel music and presents a synopsis of the lives, music, and performances of Gospel composers, singers, and arrangers Lucie Campbell, Roberta Martin, and Shirley Caesar; (4) reviews the life, music, and performances of songstress Aretha Franklin; and (5) summarizes and critiques the views of hope, salvation, and transformation expressed in selected works of these Blues and Gospel singers, in concert with tenets of womanist theory.

Hymn of Praise: Black Women Signifiers

Black women signify as they wear and celebrate the garments of self-expression. No system could silence Black women’s signifying—the revising and renaming of their realities. These magnificent creatures of ebony, chocolate, and cocoa butter give utterances of exultation and excitement, pleasure and pain, love and life, anxiety and anger, relief and reverence for God. With the onset of slavery, sounds of Black women’s daily life in the African Mother Land became mere echoes of the near, yet remote, past, when the waves of the Atlantic rocked slave ships during the Middle Passage, the denigrating journey toward institutionalized slavery that brought African women to our shores. The stench of death and nausea, the near starvation, and the angst of hopelessness did not kill the spirits of African women. Not the intentional separation of peoples with similar language and culture, nor the dehumanization of bodies packed like sardines, nor the loss of home and country, nor the fear of what was to come silenced Black female signifiers. From the beginning of civilization to the present day, these same women signified, or renamed and revised. Black women engage in renaming and revising. This renaming and revising expresses double-voicing in complex ways typified in Black music, particularly the Blues and Gospel songs, which are liturgical, evangelical, erotic, and experiential litanies.

Prayers for the People: Preaching Blueswomen

The color blue signifies serenity, peace, space, work, calm, and royalty; it tends to unify, spiritually relaxes, and effects godly grandeur and greatness; it also symbolizes coolness, even cold. The “Blues,” ethnographically derived from “Blue Devils” (an Anglo-American usage in the late eighteenth century for despondency or depression, a coldness and absence of serenity), developed as a song form at the turn of the twentieth century. These empathetic, attitudinal, cosmological, responsorial psalms signify African-American life experience beyond but not isolated from the Black Church. This experience, rooted in West African musical heritage, metamorphosed via slavery, the Emancipation, the ex-slaves’ mastery of English, minstrelsy, World War I, 1920s events (the Harlem Renaissance, the Depression, the Great Migration encouraged by the Chicago Defender), the end of the Church’s hold on African-Americans’ leisure time, and the music business, as Africans took on the consciousness of being American Negroes—a permanent part in, without being privy to all the rights of, American culture, given the essential nonhumility that dictated a slave’s and sharecropper’s life and the impact of this imposed culture. Blues evolved from spirituals,
work songs, cries, hollers, and ballads, through an improvisational, unaccompanied, musical speech, to a twelve-bar Blues vocal melody based on a five-tone scale with three-line stanzas and instrumental accompaniment. These paradoxical entities express the torment and tribulations of African-American life and articulate a toughness that liberates, inspires, and rejuvenates. As such, the Blues becomes a metaphor for these existential and ontological realities as well as the personification of the powers that instigate those pathologies which lead to illness, addictions, and human demise midst a politics of poverty, an omnipresent force in rural and urban African-American communities. Blues music is a therapy for the souls and angst of Black folk.

Singing the Blues, with their plaintive poignancy, functions as a therapeutic impetus that may be a cathartic, psychological relief and has a communicative and evocative tenet that is mood-creating and mood-matching. Functionally, one “feels” the Blues: “feeling” is an essential element of effective Blues singing, and vice versa. These psychosociological elements occur in three categories: country rural, or archaic Blues; city or classic Blues; and urban Blues. Country Blues, the earliest form, began throughout the South, especially in the Mississippi Delta. These Blues characterized had nonstandard forms and spoken introductions and endings, and usually involved a male solo singer with an unamplified guitar accompaniment. Later, accompaniment included string and/or jug bands. City or classic Blues, dominated by female singers, had a standard form with regular beginnings and endings and instrumental accompaniment of up to seven pieces. City or classic Blues drew from country Blues, Black minstrel shows, vaudeville, folk Blues, and popular song styles. Mamie Smith, the first artist who recorded Blues commercially, was a classic Blues singer. The onset of the Depression and shifting audience aesthetic sensibilities caused the demise of city Blues. The third phase, contemporary or urban Blues, from the 40s and later, involved the addition of saxophones, electric guitars, and basses, with written, arranged music, but without the country musical instruments, such as harmonicas. The sociohistorical development of the country, classic, and urban Blues patterns the subject matter and performance style of the Blues, particularly the locale of the sacred and the secular within the Blues. Scholars classify the Blues into (1) “Devil’s music,” that is, irreligious and atheistic; (2) religious and theological; and (3) neither demonic nor theological, but the articulation of social and existential concerns.

Blues scholars Paul Oliver, Paul Garon, and Giles Oakley claim that Blues is “the Devil’s music,” that is, that the language, ethos, and morality of the Blues are demonic and evil. Theologian James H. Cone argues that Blues are artistic, responorial, “secular spirituals”—functional, worldly songs that express the core of daily African-American experience. These songs unmask the chaos and difficulties Black people meet with fortitude when they try to deal with White Christian categories midst oppression; conse-

sequently, Blues people do not reject God but ignore God by embracing the joys and sorrows of life—from love and sex, mules and boll weevils, to destitution and survival. Secularity defines the focus on the immediacy and the affirmation of all physical expressions of the Black soul; spirituality defines quest for an existential and ontological truth about the African-American experience. Jon Michael Spencer, theomusicologist and Blues scholar, takes great exception to the irreligious and demonic theory, agrees with Cone, and argues that for those who have lived with the Blues, the Blues have a meaning rife with mythologies about evil, folk theories about evil, and theologies that reconcile the incongruity of historical evil with a good God. The move of the Blues from its southern, spiritual home to the urban North resulted in a shift from the country Blues experience of mythology, theology, and theodicy to a diminished religious capacity, because of the rupture and displacement of the country-to-city diaspora. Theologian and ethicist Thomas Poole contends that the lyrical Blues forms are neither the Devil’s music nor theological, although the music deals with evil and has some theological insight. He contends the Blues provide an avenue for examining an African-American existential milieu; the meaning of life and death; one’s sense of guilt and remorse; the adequacy of religion; and a celebratory, deliant survival that occurs prior to salvation and liberation.

I contend that the Blues, as signification, personification, and metaphor—in multiple levels and valences—recreate and respond to the many facets of African-American life. The Blues express double-voicing: multiple messages that signify—echo, reflect, mirror, repeat, revise, and respond to life in various ways. Black Women’s signifying is part of the sociomusical infrastructure of Black language systems and embraces the rhythm of Black life itself. The beautiful and the brusque shape these women’s creative utterances as they signify via word and song, in praise and in protest, about their existential life rhythms. These secular and spiritual melodies, by definition, are neither implicitly evil nor atheistic, since they come from a people who are neither evil nor atheistic, a people rooted in an African holistic heritage intimately related to many deities. The Blues enable Blues people to reckon with realities: life, death, sex, humor, sickness, transportation, movement, nature, suffering, humiliation, liberation, and survival. Blues provide affirmation in the face of the absurdity of oppression. Given the historical impact of the Black church in Black communities, Blues people were aware of and therefore in dialogue with concerns that were the concerns of the Church: life, liberation, and love. Realism, irony, and humor allowed Blues people to critique religious hypocrisies or to offer parallel options. The Blues did not and do not happen in a vacuum. The fluidity and oppression of Black society mean that the same tune and similar phrases may be part of a Blues and a sacred song. While the evolution of the Blues may not be as systematic as Spencer’s work implies, and while his stimulating exegesis of the Blues god is highly theoretical, his analysis
that the theologies of the Blues engage in dialectical tension with Christianity wherein Blues people borrow from “religious folklore” of the South has great credenz in numerous extant recordings. In sum, the Blues offer a rich vehicle to explore the possibilities of hope, salvation, and transformation toward somedobodiness.

“Hope” refers to an imaginative vision toward overcoming a state of reality, an expectation of the good via God’s gracious gift of liberation. Hope moves one from despair to change amid history. For the Church, the foundation of hope lies in an intimate relationship with God grounded in the overcoming of sin and death symbolized in the cross and resurrection. “Salvation” pertains to holistic health, freeing oneself, and liberation; to being delivered from evil, oppression, and dehumanization. In Christianity, salvation concerns the process of atonement, becoming “at-one” with God through Christ Jesus, as God turns “human will back to the divine orientation for which it was intended.” “Transformation” concerns being remade toward ultimate potential and fullness of life. Transformation means overcoming obstacles to a new way of being which allows one self-actualization, celebrates creation’s beauty and the process of owning and affirming one’s inner beauty, transcends denial, sees the interconnectedness of all life, and moves from daring to dream toward authentic existence. To explore the Blues as a vehicle for investigating hope, salvation, and transformation, we will examine the lives of three Blues women, beginning with the premier signifying diva, Ma Rainey, the “Mother of Blues.”

Rushing headlong
into new silence...
of a cherished dream

No reckoning allowed
save the marvelous arithmetics
of distance\(^1\)

Ma Rainey, (Gertrude Malissa Pridgett Rainey [1886-1939]) signified a “marvelous arithmetics of distance” in the era of classic or city Blues, when the most popular Blues singers were the women of the 1920s. During this time, also known as the Harlem Renaissance, many Black intellectuals and trained artists despised the “low-life” Blues, but the Black masses identified with the Blues. Classic Blues women rendered songs about deep emotional issues, poverty, and oppression, especially the oppressive contradictions of 1920s American democracy in the United States. John W. Work III, composer and folk song collector, says that classic Blues were secular songs about daily life; classic Blueswomen were disillusioned, had little hope, and interpreted daily life into their own “intimate inconvenience.”\(^14\) Disillusionment bolstered the artistry and truth-telling in their songs. In 1902, Rainey first heard the Blues, and she began to specialize in singing these songs of signified misery, a response, through moans and tones, to specific life events which makes life bearable again. Rainey linked older rural Blues to classic city Blues as she worked with numerous great musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Joe Smith, and Bessie Smith. Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of Gospel music, was Rainey’s arranger, pianist, and band director.

Born in Georgia, Rainey debuted in a revue at fourteen. Rainey, a complex yet obscure person, married Will “Pa” Rainey in 1904, and the two became a song and dance team.\(^15\) Her fame increased as the Blues gained in popularity, and she toured with various revues and entertainment organizations, such as Tilliver’s Circus and Musical Extravaganza and the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Bedecked with diamond tiaras, necklaces and earrings made of gold pieces, rings, and bracelets, Rainey danced and did comedy, novelty, ballads, and topical songs. Rainey, also known as Madame Gertrude, was both a comic big mama and a sex symbol. She participated in tent performances despite segregationist oppression; her variety shows included her telling vulgar jokes about craving young men, followed by her singing, often ending with “See, See Rider,” a showstopper.\(^16\) Rainey knew how to work an audience. She worked with local jazz bands, did stage work, and was a recording artist in New York and Chicago. This even-tempered, big-hearted woman was sexually involved with men and women and sang about the troubles of lonely, violent women, inequality, private hardships, lynching, and chain gangs—balanced with comedy. Rainey became a national recording star in 1923 with a recording contract from Paramount Record Company, continued doing independent acts, and toured with the Theater Owners’ Booking Agency.\(^17\) Rainey toured until 1935, then returned to the South, the place of her home and her heart. She bought and operated two theaters near Columbus, Georgia, until her death, around Christmas 1939. Her recordings remind us of who she was. For example, Rainey acknowledged the human need for frailty, the need to feel special, and the wrong of spousal abuse, and she blamed human troubles on the Blues:

You can have my money...
But for God sake,
Leave my man alone
’Cause I’m just jealous, jealous, jealous
I’m just jealous, tired, and mean.\(^18\)

It’s raining out here
And things ain’t working right;
I’m going home, I know I got to fight.
If you hit me tonight,
Let me tell you what I’m going to do
I’m going to take you to court
And tell the Judge on you...
women, especially those wronged in love, permission, passively or actively, to name the demons, to personify, to identify their angst, and to experience and respond to that angst in a variety of ways. Her other, lighthearted or cynical song categories involved comedy, parody, self-mockery, and songs of oppression that lead to suspicion and fear or philosophical reflection, all dealing with the tough realities of life. Ma Rainey, a new female Black entertainment symbol, was "a mama, an authority generative, nurturant, yet sexual, who combined eros and homelies, sex appeal and self-mockery, pathos and humor; the mythopoetic estalisher of tradition, a Black culture-heroe." An energetic, two-career musician and former nurse, a contemporary of Ma Rainey who was so enamored of America that she did seven USO tours, was Alberta Hunter.

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes;
But I laugh.
And I eat well,
And grow strong.

Besides, they'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

Alberta Hunter (1895-1984), best described by "I. Too," her favorite Langston Hughes poem, was an international Blues/jazz/cabaret singer, songwriter, recording artist, chanteuse, Broadway star, entertainer, humanitarian, and nurse par excellence. Born in Memphis, Hunter was dubbed "Lady Hunter," "ragtime songbird deluxe," "prima donna of Blues singers," "the Songbird of the West," "one of "great, great presence," "dusty songstress," "Apostle of Gaiety," "Hospital Mommy," a "rare gem," and the "Sapphire of Blues," a captivating persona with a lyrical voice. Hunter moved from a life of poverty, discrimination, and little formal education to become a renowned preacher of Blues songs throughout the world. An optimist and survivor, Hunter did not let racism hinder her self-esteem, although the sexism of childhood molestations caused her to fear or resent most men. She left Memphis for Chicago, while still in her teens, with great determination to become a singer. Willing to work hard, she peeled potatoes and washed dishes. She started singing at Dago Frank's, a bordello, for pennies, and was nurtured by the women who worked there. She later moved her mother to Chicago and continued to work at her singing and songwriting.

Hunter advanced to more elite clubs and made money by singing new works of other composers. She continued to soar, claiming that the Blues
were not evil but were stories from one's soul, even though Blues broke social conventions by allowing singers, notably women, to talk about loneliness, frustrations, sex, and infidelity. Early on, Hunter became friends with Eubie Blake, Love Austin, Harry Watkins, and Paul Robeson, forming friendships that lasted fifty to sixty years. Even with her associations, however, Hunter remained a loner and continued to pursue her own solo career. Alberta was friends with Lil and Louis Armstrong and later married Willard Townsend. Independent Alberta thought a man could be a status symbol but was not interested in intimacy with her husband, because she was a lesbian and a most private person; she loved Willard as a special friend but went on entertaining at cabarets and had no desire to be a stay-at-home wife. Alberta worked in both Chicago and New York clubs and cut her first record for Black Swan Records in 1921. Her first song to become a hit, "Down Hearted Blues," was also recorded by Bessie Smith:

My man mistreated me, and he throwed me from his door;
My man mistreated me, and he throwed me from his door;
But the Good Book say, you got to reap just what you sow.
I got the world in a jug, & the trouble right here in my hands,
I got the world in a jug, & the trouble right here in my hands;
And if you want me sweet papa,
You got to come under my command.

I ain't never loved but three men in my life,
I ain't never loved but three men in my life;
But my father, and my brother,
And a man that wrecked my life;
Lord it may be a week, and it may be a month or two
Lord it may be a week, and it may be a month or two;
All the things you're doing to me sho's coming home to you.

Lord I walk the floor, wring my hands and cry,
Lord I walk the floor, wring my hands and cry;
Have the down hearted Blues
And I couldn't be satisfied.

In 1927, Hunter went to Europe, allegedly for a vacation but actually to further her career, knowing that her African-American friends such as Roland Hayes, Florence Mills, and Marion Anderson were having success abroad and often had European benefactors. Hunter used travel as a substitute for the formal education she did not have. She wrote letters that were published in Black American newspapers as travelogues, including a recurring column in the Afro-American called "Alberta Hunter's Little Notebook." She sang with various combinations of piano, horns, reeds, guitar, strings, and light percussion. After her first stint in Europe in 1929, Hunter found that her sophistication and her fluent French were not enough to thwart rampant racism. Not bitter, however, Hunter encouraged Black entertainers to perform in the South in the early 1940s, and groomed others for greatness. Hunter quit her singing career in 1956.

In 1955 and 1956, Hunter did volunteer work at the Joint Diseases Hospital in Harlem, passed the city's elementary school equivalency exam, and persuaded the director of the YWCA nursing program to push her age back and admit her to the LPN program. At the capping ceremony, Hunter sang her own song, "I Want To Thank You, Lord." Hunter finished her internship and went to work at the Goldwater Hospital at age sixty-two. She was a gracious, kind, loving, and sympathetic attendant to mostly elderly and chronically ill patients for the next twenty years. During these years, she lived a spartan, anonymous life but was a benefactor to many. After her mandatory retirement at eighty-two, Hunter was "rediscovered" and opened at the Cookery in Greenwich Village in October, 1977. She was an immediate sensation.

With mystery, innate elegance, and style, Hunter wowed her contemporary audience. She sang about truth, and she sang about love. Jazz, Blues, ballads, and show tunes were her sermons as she preached. She told children to get in touch with their parents; she was everybody's grandmother.

The "Apostle of Gaiety" sang her thoughts and advice in English, German, French, and Danish. Hunter claimed that the Blues were like the spirit to a minister, and one would sing the Blues because of past hurt. The Blues were not a few ordinary worries, or wanting things one could maybe do without: "Blues is when you're hungry and you don't have money to buy food. Or you can't pay your rent at the end of the month. Blues is when you disappoint somebody else." For Hunter, the Blues were a language of love. She was continuously interviewed and feted on national television; appeared in numerous clubs and jazz festivals; was on the soundtrack for the film Remember My Name; was the toast of Brazil; was honored by the city of Memphis; and sang at the White House for President Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter. She inspired thousands not to give up, as she championed the human spirit. When Hunter, aged eighty-nine, died quietly and unexpectedly at her apartment in October 1984, she wanted "no funeral, no flowers, and above all no exhibition even for the most loving friends . . . If I have been help to any living being, let them think of that the day they hear I am dead. A-men." Another private woman, with a distinctive personality, dreadlocks, and casual appearance, is Blues-folk artist Tracy Chapman.

sing a Black girl's song
bring her out
to know herself
to know you
but sing her rhythms
an intimacy that "like a blanket of fog, envelop[s] the audience with a pleasur-able authority. And the audience love[s] it."42 Her nonstandard music videos have a "raw desperation in her bluesy voice, and her shy-yet-tough demeanor enable[s] her performance[s]"43 to be moving and powerful. Chapman's shyness and comfortableness with intimate settings perhaps explains her preference for the coffeehouse milieu and to make a living by making music but not to be a superstar. Chapman has already won numerous awards, domestic and international. She also played at Wembley Stadium in England for the Nelson Mandela Birthday Tribute.44

Given the ties between Thomas A. Dorsey and Ma Rainey, and Dorsey's development of the Gospel music tradition, when taking a broad look at African-American religious and cultural history, the relationship between Blues and Gospel becomes apparent. Just what is Black Gospel music?

Scripture Reading: Pronouncing the Gospel

Black Gospel music, a product and symbol of African-American religion like the Blues, was shaped by the sociocultural environment of the Great Migration. These songs come out of a Black aesthetic that reflects a history, ritual, and social interaction of a collective Black ethnic, holistic, cultural identity.45 Black Gospel song developed in northern urban, revival, and evangelistic settings. Building on their southern roots, church singers created a music that blended Blues tunes and sacred texts in the early 1930s. The various melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic configurations in the Gospel song revealed a personal experience, either in solo or choral Gospel Blues.46 Up to the 1960s, the Sanctified or Holy Rollers and a few Free Will and Primitive Baptist churches nurtured this music. The Church sees the proper context for Gospel music as the Church. The evolution of Gospel music, however, has produced a sacred style by singers who sing either for church people or in church settings, and secular Gospel performed in nightclubs, jazz clubs, and other more secular venues. The meaning of the songs became predicated on place and audience. The 1969 success of Edwin Hawkins's arrangement of "Oh, Happy Day," not only made Gospel music a "hit" but also created a wide acceptance of message songs, songs with a text that counsel or comment on society (avoiding the words heaven, Jesus, or God) but that depend musically on the Gospel style and sound. These songs are a midpoint between Gospel music, both typology and pianistic style, and soul music.47

This type of song involves texts about the trinitarian God, blessings, sorrows, difficulties, praises, joys, and laments. The piano style involves chords and syncopation. Gospel began to make a large impact after being adopted by National Baptist Convention soloists. Gospel music, first noted and published by Thomas A. Dorsey, has five basic styles: (1) a cappella male songs; (2) quartet groups; (3) female Gospel groups; (4) the chorus or choir of combined male and female voices; and (5) congrega-
tional Gospel songs, or those songs adapted by each congregation from written and oral sources, usually performed during testimony and tarrying services in Black holiness churches, with solo Gospel singers who may or may not have choral backup. Gospel singing styles involve four distinctive elements: (1) melodic and rhythmic timbre, (2) range, (3) text interpolation, and (4) improvisation. Timbre, or tone quality, focuses on a strained, full-throated, authoritative sound, with or without amplification. Along with the Gospel timbre, singers must have an even, fast vibrato and agility. A wide range from earthy, low, and mellow tones to high tenor and soprano with falsetto sounds is also a “must” for a beautiful Gospel voice. Interpolation involves an ability to use ornamentation, to play with the notes, bend, slur, scoop, slide, skillfully use textual repetition, and create emotional climaxes through sound. In contemporary Gospel, instrumental music with a variety of forms, from verse-chorus and theme and variation to Blues structures, strophic, and call-and-response forms, is integral. A Gospel singer must be able to improvise, to ad-lib words, interject responses to a call and, vocally do obbligatos and scales interspersed with high notes. These various stylistic techniques are the tools that Gospel composers, singers, and arrangers use to signify in Gospel music. A preeminent leader in this genre is Lucie Eddie Campbell Williams.

If when you give the best of your service,
Telling the world that the Savior is come;
Be not dismayed when friends don’t believe you;
He understands; He’ll say, “Well done.”

Lucie Eddie Campbell Williams (1885-1963) was the first woman Gospel composer. Campbell served on the committee that chose the music for the monumental 1921 collection: The Gospel Pearls. Basically self-taught, she studied music and earned a bachelor of arts degree at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. With her organizing ability and leadership, Campbell was instrumental in shaping the music of the National Baptist Convention (the largest body of African-American Christians) during her professional career from 1919 to 1962. Campbell wrote the songs and shaped the singing and performance style of the new pioneers of Gospel music, including the lined hymn style, where one recites the text in an oratorical fashion and then the congregation sings them in time and in tune. Campbell, with strong melodic gifts, liked the classical tradition and songs that stressed a slow pace, especially the Gospel ballad, in which one could signify about sorrow and joy. Her early hymns involved original songs and arrangements of spirituals. She also wrote jubilee songs which had a moderately fast, steady tempo, responsorial call and response, and some syncopation. A key contribution was her Gospel waltz, which stressed three beats in the bass with a contrasting melody in the treble, and which became a standardized form by the 1950s.

Born in Mississippi to former slaves, Campbell lived through a period that recognized the aesthetics and originality of the spirituals and saw the end of minstrelsy, the beginnings of ragtime, the emergence of the Blues as a genre, the beginning of jazz, the impact of African-Americans on Broadway, and the Great Migration to urban areas like Chicago that ushered in the modern Gospel music era. Black church people enjoyed her music because it expressed the Black experience, and because of her vivid use of biblical narrative imagery to minister and offer coherence to her life and the life of the Black community. A modest, pampered persona who glorified her womanhood, and a committed educator and evangelist for Jesus Christ, Campbell also had a fiery temper and temperament. Major conflicts between Campbell and Black Baptist church administration and protocol twice resulted in Campbell’s being “churched,” wherein the right hand of fellowship is withdrawn, that is, one is excommunicated. These painful events led to two of her most inspiring songs, “He’ll Understand and Say Well Done” and “Just to Behold His Face.” The song “Something Within” developed when Campbell witnessed a destitute singer refusing to sing Blues because there was “something within.” Campbell also signed by teaching American history and English for more than fifty years at the B. T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee. Married at age seventy-five, Campbell died in Nashville in 1963.

Another signifying, pioneering Gospel singer and composer was Roberta Martin.

God is still on the throne
within your bosom you have the phone
where e’re you walk you’re not walking alone
Remember God is still on the throne.

Roberta Martin (1907-1969), committed to Christian hope and love, signified as she introduced and developed the classical Gospel choral sound that created the model sound of the community-based church Gospel choir. Martin excelled as composer, singer, pianist, arranger, and group and choral organizer, and she founded and operated her own Gospel music publishing house in Chicago. She combined the “moan” from her Arkansas Baptist childhood with the Dorsey bounce, a bit of semiclassical expression, and the sanctified churches’ syncopation to help forge the classic Gospel music sound. The Roberta Martin sound embraced a collective resonance, a vocal sheen, and a professional and spiritual integrity that, according to Gospel announcer and promoter Joe Bostic, was righteous, rich, and restful. Martin combined female high soprano, second soprano, alto, male first and second tenor, and baritone to create a mellow, smooth, harmonic, rich sound. She composed about 70 songs and published and arranged 280 Gospel songs. She arranged many songs for James Cleveland, Alex Bradford, Lucy Matthews, Jessye Dixon, and Myrtle Jackson. Through
performances and selling sheet music, Martin reached thousands. She made
the music come alive in a way that the printed score alone could not. Dur-
ing the 1940s and 1950s, the Roberta Martin Singers did singing evan-
gelizing with the masses in their travels throughout the United States and Eu-
rope, with dignity and integrity, calling all to love, hope, and Christian
discipleship. The message was packaged in a merging of West African
and Western European traditions.

Martin combined the African melody, rhythm, and ensemble with Euro-
pean order, form, and harmony to produce her classic Gospel sound, es-
specially the use of scales, tension and release in each song, the develop-
ment of the Gospel cadence formula, and the introduction of substitution chords
to end a song. Horace Boyer, Gospel music scholar, claims Martin’s pianistic
style held the “nuances of a Horowitz, the inventions of an Ellington,
and the power of an Erroll Garner, all the while playing ‘straight from the
church.’” Those who sang with Martin, selected for their individual style,
applauded her giving spirit, her unique abilities and approach to Gospel
music, and her commitment to ministry. Martin’s music targeted the
listener’s heart, mind, soul, hands, and feet. That same commitment shaped
her roles in marriage and motherhood. Sources disagree as to her wealth,
but Martin left the world a richer place. Gospel scholar Tony Heilbut notes
that the sound Martin helped create is everywhere, from rock music’s re-
liency and symphonies to detergent commercials. At her death in 1969,
fifty thousand Chicagoans went to Mount Pigsah Baptist Church to say
“thank you.”

A dynamic songstress and minister who also writes and preaches Gos-
pel is Pastor Shirley Caesar.

This joy I have, the world didn’t give it to me;...
The world didn’t give it, the world didn’t give it to me.
This love I have, the world didn’t give it to me;...
The world didn’t give it, the world didn’t give it to me.

There are many things in this life that we have,
That people can take from us....
The holy ghost that I have, the world didn’t give it to me...
The world didn’t give it, the world didn’t give it to me...
Who gave it to me?
Nobody but Jesus.

Shirley Caesar (1938-), a native of Durham, North Carolina, signifies as a
contemporary Gospel singer, pastor, evangelist, civic leader, and business-
woman, an educated, saved soulster filled with the spirit, a marionette for
Jesus. Gifted with great muscular control, Caesar dances, shouts, moves,
preaches, and inspires. She is full of energy and spunk. She steps quickly in
her two-inch heels between boardroom, pulpit, and concert stage as a con-
cerned citizen and minister who focuses on the needy as opposed to the
greed. A Durham City Councilwoman from 1987 to 1991, Caesar spends
about twenty-five hours a week at the Shirley Caesar Outreach Ministry
(funded by 50 percent of her earnings) out of her concern that the eco-

nic boom in the North Carolina Research Triangle area will not displace
people and that she is obedient to God’s message “Feed my sheep.” Conse-
quently, her ministry focuses on emergency food, funds for utilities and
rent, clothing, and shelter for the destitute and needy—to give a hand, not
a handout. Caesar, one of twelve children, once intimately knew that need.

Her father, a Gospel quartet singer with the Just Come Four, died when
she was twelve, and she was left with an invalid mother. Caesar joined
forces with Leroy Johnson, an evangelist gospel preacher in the 1950s, in a
traveling and television ministry and joined the Caravans in 1958 with lead
coloratura Alberta Walker; Inez Andrews, the “High Priestess of Gospel”;
and Sarah McKissick, Gospel ballad singer. By 1961, she both found her
own style and turned the Apollo Theatre out singing “Hallelujah Tis Done”
in the African-American folk preacher style, that is, the song and sermonette
style actualized by Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith and perfected by Edna
Gallmon Cooke, which became Caesar’s trademark. Her style grew with
using blue notes and slurs, and achieving rhythmic effects by repeating
consonants and using intense nasality, and high or very low “yeahs” with
the heavy breathing of an old country preacher. In 1966, Shirley left the
Caravans and moved into the genre of “mother” songs and “house-rocking
songs.

Caesar’s “Don’t Drive Your Mama Away” (1969), a song-sermonette, tells
a story of a mother and two sons, which ends with the rescue of the mother
by the wayward son. “No Charge,” the story of a small child who submits a
bill to his mother for his chores and receives in response a list of all she
has done for him at no charge, was also a hit. Her “house-rocking” songs
involve a fast or medium tempo and her top range, ornamentation, and
improvisations as she runs and shouts for Jesus. Her “running for Jesus”

involves performing more than 150 concerts a year, including Caravan re-
union concerts, and serving as pastor of the Mount Calvary Word of Faith
Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Previously, she copastored in Winston-
Salem with her husband, Bishop Harold L. Williams. Caesar’s greatness has
been recognized by academics and the music and entertainment indus-
tries.

Known both as the “First Lady” and “Queen of Gospel,” her honors in-
clude five Grammy Awards and six Dove Awards for Gospel. Caesar has
also performed at the White House for President George Bush. One of her
current passions is to use song, nurturing, teaching, and talking, to be a
preacher and reacher for youth:

“I come from a long line of poor folk, and I told the Lord God if [God] helped me to pull up and out of the ghetto, I would reach back and help
of soulful signifying, Franklin is to contemporary pop and soul what Ella Fitzgerald is to jazz. Certainly, "Lady Soul" commands R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

Sermonic Reflection: Hope, Salvation, Transformation

Rainey, Hunter, Chapman, Campbell, Martin, Caesar, and Franklin have signified and continue to signify through Blues and Gospels. This study has focused on their biographies, their stories. This step is critical for womanist reflection that, by definition, uses many sources, like social, anthropological, and theological materials, to engage in dialogue, celebrate liturgy, be pedagogical, and commit to using female imagery to unmask and transcend oppression due to race, class, and gender. Womanist reflection celebrates these powerful women with diverse, difficult, and amazing life experiences, filled with talents, goals, visions, personas, relationships, spirituality, and theologies. What, if anything, does justified (saved), sanctified (perfected in hope), and redeemed (transformed) mean in selected works of these seven songsters?

Ma Rainey sings songs about love and life. She minces no words as she describes the blues, misery, infidelity, alcoholism, hysteria, revenge, illness, prison, death, murder, finding a man, education, migration, and natural disasters, along with singing songs of female aggression and unconventional sexuality. In Rainey’s classic “Downhearted Blues,” she tells about the reality and pain of a bad relationship but argues that (1) it is hard to love someone who does not love you; (2) she will get a good man next time; (3) the Good Book says you must reap what you sow; and (4) she has a choice of who is a part of her world. She does not settle for being a victim, but owns up to her own responsibility. In this song and others, Rainey brings hope through her use of irony, comedy, and double entendre. One experiences hope and salvation through living life to its fullest and through self-actualization as a Black woman, especially sexually. She makes private matters public and sometimes entertains sexually controversial issues. Her form of unmasking becomes therapeutic, as one must examine those issues previously kept hidden. Sometimes her songs are reflective and main social commentary. Sometimes the songs espouse sound ethical choices; other times the “reap what you sow” theodicy allows redress. In still other instances, “the Blues” become the scapegoat for all manner of social and interpersonal ills. Her songs become transforming as she (1) talks about reality—violence and sex, suffering and poverty, hope and humor—the first step for overcoming any obstacle; (2) omits more traditional roles often used to oppress women; and (3) sings about strength, fortitude, and endurance, the qualities needed for survival and for fueling change. Her “love” songs reflect that one has choices: to suffer passively, be catatonic, be a victim; to get in touch with one’s anger; to change one’s depressed state by thinking, by having an aggressive catharsis, by getting drunk; to take action through making a geographical move, reclaiming one’s man, taking
refuge with family; to confront one's betrayer; or, when abandoned by a man, to appeal to God for salvation from starvation and to no longer focus on a man for economic support. Her comic and cynical songs, where humor may be in the context rather than the content, use parody to talk about topics from sore feet, self-mockery, and fatalism to having fun singing and dancing. Ultimately, most of Rainey's female characters want to experience transformation, and her lyrics provide choices.

Alberta Hunter also offers her listeners choices. Hunter's choices deal with relationships and with one's own vision of life. By "Always" being there for friends, she celebrates the importance of relationship. Forever an optimist, she also talks about reality and the possibility of overcoming; when her "Handy Man Ain't Handy No More," or when he will "paw his Bible to get Amtrak fare," she knows that trouble cannot last always. Through struggle, she will see a brighter day. In her "Now I'm Satisfied," she maintains hope through prayers, tears, and searching, which then allows her to hear the voice of salvation, giving her a grand and glorious feeling, since the Lord is always by her side. Salvation involves the call to be accountable and to ask the Lord for forgiveness, for God tries to warn one through the sign of the rainbow. Heaven, the social location of salvation, is free and comes with everlasting life for the faithful. Salvation may come through that "second handed man of hers" and, therefore, does not preclude one from a full life experience of sorrow and joy. She calls for dancing at the "Darktown Strutter's Ball" to the "Jelly Roll [sexual technique and genitals] Blues"; all is not carefree, however, because "Nobody knows you when you're down and out." One must live for today and deal with the consequences, without the control of others. This quest for freedom and self-reliance can be viewed as a basis both for hopeful living and for experiencing transformation. Sometimes bad luck and trouble may arise, but change through good luck is bound to come one's way; other times one can act through singing a new tune.

Tracy Chapman often sees opportunity and possibility in sociopolitical and geographical terms. She frames hope through movement and action, as "Matters of the Heart." One can envision newness through a revolution, by daring to go "Across the Lines" in a "Fast Car" and by asking hard questions and facing hard realities: Why do babies starve in a world with abundant food? Is love worth the sacrifices one makes? How does one deal with alcoholism? How can we sleep when from behind the wall the cries of spousal abuse are in a silence that chills the soul, when we meet with an ambulance and police apathy? A reality check precedes salvation and liberation, often self-actualized. Salvation involves loving oneself today, not waiting until morning, a new day, or until the loss is too great. Sometimes liberation comes through an exodus, so if "She's Got Her Ticket," it is time to leave the hatred, corruption, and greed that leave one with nothing, no chances. Salvation is personal and social; thus society is responsible for the accessibility of guns and drugs that anesthetize and remove young men or us from our reality. Salvation calls for social equity, an appreciation of nature, and the love for others. Transformation occurs when society and individuals see and own up to reality and dream about the possibilities to have patience and trust and to experience pain and memories, "If These Are the Things" of which dreams are made. Transformation requires that we hold each other and open our arms to each other, for these are "Matters of the Heart."

Lucie Campbell signifies about matters of the heart in light of her relationship with Christ Jesus. Campbell, a keen observer of life, knows hope because Jesus knows how much one can bear and understands, which allows people to understand life's chaos and confusion in time. The possibility of overcoming personal or social mistakes can happen because Jesus promises never to leave one alone and provides leadership; life is sweet when one follows the "Footprints of Jesus." This leadership allows one to praise and honor God as gracious redeemer, master, and friend, and to be a soldier in God's army. Knowing whom to praise and honor begins the experience of salvation. Salvation and liberation are freedom from thirst, loneliness, betrayal, being misunderstood, and wrongdoing. That kind of freedom pushes one daily to want to be with Jesus, "Just to Behold His Face." Jesus is both a historic figure and "Something Within." Something within helps to change and transform one's life situation and personal attitudes. When the Light of Jesus shines on a person, that person can let his or her own light shine. Light transforms darkness, transforms the self.

Roberta Martin lets her light shine through creating a sound and body of songs that invite people to "Try Jesus." Martin's songs express hope through consolation and reassurance: no matter the magnitude of personal burdens, sorrows, weariness, or sin, Jesus satisfies. One has blessed assurance in the Savior. The good news is that when in trouble, when others fail, "God Is Still on the Throne." In this hope, one finds salvation because those who labor and are heavy laden can come to Jesus. One knows salvation and holistic health by going to the supreme physician, the one who never loses a case, for "God Specializes." God dispenses a type of freedom that effects healing, illumination, and empowerment. Regardless of the depths of disease, God's remedies transcend need, neglect, and harassment. The knowledge of that transcendence opens the door to transformation. Transformation occurs on a daily basis through God's many glimmers of grace. "Only a Look at Jesus" personifies a move toward peace, comfort, and safe completion of a journey. One can overcome denial and all other obstacles, because God's "Grace" is sufficient. Because "There Is No Failure in God," ultimately those who trust God never fail.

Shirley Caesar also preaches and teaches a gospel about a never-failing God. Caesar talks about hope on a daily basis, for one can only live life "One Day at a Time." If the Lord teaches one to live one day at a time, there is always possibility and a sense of renewal. The reality of hope also implies that possibility always exists, because there is nothing people do that can earn what God gives. The fact that people often fall short reiterates one's inability to obtain God's goodness; thus, one needs Jesus. Hu-
man shortcomings make salvation an ongoing and dynamic process. One may have to find one’s way to Jesus, who then helps one see the light. The experience of the gift of salvation becomes the call to “Reach Out and Touch” someone else. Because “Jesus Is a Friend,” one can get up off one’s sickbed and be upon one’s feet. Salvation involves asking, “Lord Let Your Spirit Fall on Me” for empowerment through a Pentecostal blessing. Salvation and liberation involve working on personal relationships, knowing that the Lord is ever present. Just as the “Eye [is] on the Sparrow,” the Lord is with humanity. The beginning of transformation is knowing that people need God to walk in front of them, to empower and guide them. Although powers and principalities come against people, like they did against Jesus, “Sunday’s on the Way,” the possibility for resurrection time, changing time. Having a little talk with Jesus the source, the energizer, the eternal love serves as a catalyst for minuscule or cataclysmic movement. Change requires one to accept God’s love, encourage and honor others, and, “Be Careful of the Stones You Throw.” One not only experiences self-actualization in the Lord, but one can then help others know authentic existence.

Aretha Franklin testifies to that kind of relationship with God in “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.” Steeped in Gospels, Franklin remains hopeful because “One Lord” is the author and finisher of her faith. These songs not only praise God but also talk about a person’s relationship with God, proclaiming good news, glad tidings. Hope is present because “Jesus Hears Every Prayer,” and that “God Is Able” is symbolized by rainbows. Rainbows do not expect that people do not have hard times. One may have “Trouble in Mind.” If the blues overcome an individual, he or she may lose his or her mind or at least will have to leave the troubled environs. Nevertheless, the sun will shine someday. In bad relationships, Franklin would rather drink “Muddy Water” before she sees her baby with another woman. The realization that she cannot trust that man opens the possibility for a newness, the newness born of freedom. Salvation portends a divine and a human process. This liberation means to “Walk in the Light,” to dance, sing, and shout about “Oh, Happy Day.” Liberation for Franklin means a cornucopia of choices: to be alone, to have company, to say yes, no, or maybe, because she is in the presence of “Dr. Feelgood” and delights to “Walk on Higher Ground.” Feeling good allows one to know when “I’ve Been in the Storm Too Long” and to demand R-E-S-P-E-C-T. One must be in tune with God and with self. Being in tune with reality supports an experience of transformation. Transformation means that one can “Never Grow Old” in the revealed newness of life in Christ, moment to moment.

**Invitation and Benediction: Come Listen, Go Tell It!**

From Rainey to Franklin, these dynamic women preach and teach about all facets of life. Some are anthropological, moving from an earthy, humanistic, sensual, practical perspective that exposes the school of hard knocks.

Some champion a love of *eros*, *filia*, and *agape* shared with an implicit or explicit God, self, and society. The *eros* celebrates sexuality in a biblical and a profane manner. *Filia* allows one to maintain healthy relationships and to be conscious and supportive of one’s neighbor. *Agape* invites one to be Jesus and to be of Jesus to self and others however one may be. In sum, the hope is that one lives a responsible life and is not a victim of the self or of another—that one embraces life with a hopeful imagination and with laughter. Salvation is the gift of freedom from alienation, destruction, evil, apathy, betrayal, denial, and self-imposed limitations. Transformation involves imagining a personal and societal metamorphosis that allows humanity to “go where no one has ever gone before,” without self-destruction. Gospels and Blues, sociopolitical vehicles, can raise human consciousness and accountability.

Many of these songs embody an evolving eschatology wherein one does not defer life until after death. One experiences life to the fullest (sometimes responsibly, other times not) and thus envisions heaven as either intimacy with God or peace with self now. From a Christian perspective, the expectations after death are for a heightened experience of what already is.

In 1990s womanist language, these artists call everyone to (1) be real; (2) name the oppressions (e.g., spousal and child abuse, AIDS, apathy) and work to transcend them; (3) celebrate ourselves, our gifts, and each other; (4) recognize the Blues and deal with them; (5) recognize the Gospel message and live by it; and (6) live life and do your job with integrity. Bad things happen, but one does not have to go around creating them. Thus, an individual, created in God’s image, can live in hope and anticipation. One is justified and saved to be loved: doing love better and living life rightly. One is redeemed and freed toward greatness and community.

On behalf of these preaching, singing women, I extend an invitation to listen to their words, meditations, the music. Go in peace and celebration.

**A-men.**

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**Black Women’s Gospels and Blues: An Eclectic Discography**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Disc</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tracy Chapman</td>
<td><em>Tracy Chapman</em> Elektra Entertainment, 1988</td>
<td>CD: Elektra 9 60774-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matters of the Heart</td>
<td><em>Elektra Entertainment</em>, 1992</td>
<td>CD: Elektra 9 61215-2</td>
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Amtrak Blues
CBS, 1980
CD: CK 36430

The Legendary Alberta Hunter
DRG Records, 1981
CD: CDSL 5195

Chicago: The Living Legends
Riverside Records, 1984
CD: OBCCD 510-2
(RLP 9418)

Young Alberta Hunter: The ’20s and the ’30s
Jass Records, 1988
CD: Jass J-CD-6

Ma Rainey

AC/DC Blues: Prove It on Me Blues,
Stash Records, 1972
LP: ST 106

Street Walking Blues: Hustlin’ Blues
Stash Records, 1979
LP: ST 117

Them Dirty Blues: Sissy Blues [Side E]
Jass Records, 1985
LP: Jass Box 1

News and the Blues: Telling It Like It Is:
Memphis Minnie
CBS, 1990
CD: CK 46217

Ma Rainey
Milestone, 1992
CD: MCD-47021-2

Ma Rainey: The Complete 1928 Sessions
Document Records, 1993
CD: DOCD 5156

Gospel

Roberta Martin

The Great Gospel Women: What a Friend
Shanachie, 1993
CD: Shanachie 6004

Shirley Caesar

Sailin’: Word/Epic, 1984
CD: KE-48800

First Lady
HOB Records, 1992
CD: HBD-3515

Shirley Caesar’s Treasures
HOB Records, 1992
CD: HOB-3501

Why Me Lord
HOB Records, 1992
CD: HBD-3510

Songstress

Aretha Franklin

I Never Loved a Man the Way I Loved You
Atlantic, 1967
CD: Atlantic 8139-2

Aretha: The First 12 Sides
CBS, 1972
CD: CK 31953

Aretha Sings the Blues
CBS, 1985
CD: CK 40105

Composers and Arrangers
Lucie E. Campbell
Robert Martin

African American Gospel:
The Pioneering Composers:
Something Within, He’ll Understand and Say Well Done,
Touch Me, Lord Jesus,
Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings: Wade in the Water Series III, 1994
CD: SF40074

Notes
1. No single identifiable entity called the “Black Church” exists; this institution is a multifaceted, diverse institution labeled such because the membership and leadership are presently and have always been predominately Black. The sociohistorical, dogmatic differences between African-American sects have always been adjuvant to the unifying force engendered by a common ethnicity and a shared oppression.

2. See LeRoy Jones (Amiri Baraka), Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It (New York: Morrow, 1963), x, 3, 7, 50-
51, 59, 63.


6. See Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History (New York: Norton, 1971), 332-36, 339. Mamie Smith recorded her song “Crazy Blues” on the Okeh Recording Company label and sold more than seventy-five hundred recordings per week. Within two years, companies were selling more than five million “race records” to African-Americans. A Black-owned recording company was born in 1921: Harry Pace’s Phonograph Corporation, later renamed the Black Swan Phonograph Company. Pace finally found a company, New York Recording Laboratory Company, in Port Washington, Wisconsin, to press his records. Pace made a good effort and lasted for about two years, when the invention of the radio threatened to put all recording companies into bankruptcy.

7. See Paul Oliver, Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Garon, Blues and the Poetic Spirit
only eleven. Taylor and Cook state that she traveled on a child’s train pass but place the date as 1911, which would make Hunter sixteen. Other passages in the same biography imply that she was a mere child, which is why she could not sing in clubs early on without getting owners in trouble for having a minor on the premises.

29. Ibid., 12, 14, 28, 35-37.
30. Ibid., 36, 42.
34. Taylor and Cook, Alberta Hunter, 204-32.
37. Ibid., 282.
38. nolake shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem (New York: Macmillan, 1977), dust jacket notes.
44. Who’s Who in African-Americans, 261.
45. See Mellonee Victoria Burnim, “The Black Gospel Music Tradition: Symbol of Ethnicity” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1980), 1, 3, 6, 9, 192-97. This musical tradition transcends age, denominational, and geographic boundaries; comprises social and ritual interaction within the United States; has a multifaceted ideology, aesthetic, and behavior; has a uniform yet contrasting individual and collective system; has diverse functions; and encompasses sacred and secular musical forms and nonmusical forms of expression.
50. The National Baptist Convention of the USA was formed in 1885 in a merger of the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention (founded 1880), the American Baptist
Convention (1866), and the Baptist National Educational Convention (1893). In 1915, the National Baptist Convention of the USA split over the ownership of the Publishing Board. The parent organization became incorporated, and the National Baptist Publishing Board (NBPPB) and the Home Mission Board withdrew to become the National Baptist Convention of America (unincorporated) until a split in 1988 resulted in the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America and the National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.


53. Roberta Martin, "God Is Still on the Throne" (Chicago: Roberta Martin Studio of Music, 1959).

54. See Pearl Williams-Jones, "Roberta Martin: Spirit of an Era," 255-58; and Pearl Williams-Jones and Bernice Johnson Reagon, eds., "Conversations: Roberta Martin Singers Roundtable," in 199, We'll Understand It Better By and By.

55. Pearl Williams-Jones, "Roberta Martin," 266, 271.


60. See Boyer, "Shirley Caesar," 215; and Heilbut, Gospel Sound, 240-41.


Woman at the Well

Mahalia Jackson and the Inner and Outer Spiritual Transformation

Mozella G. Mitchell

Jules Schwerin, in his impressionistic biography of Mahalia Jackson, Got to Tell It: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel, describes his work as not a formal biography as such, but one about Mahalia’s voice, where she took it, and where it took her. He elaborates on his personal impressions and reactions to the events of her life as she related them to him, blended with his later observations (both “gentle and critical”). He has performed an excellent task in examining and relating Mahalia’s life from his own and many other perspectives. Yet amid all the facts, information, descriptions, insights, and impressions the author presents, Mahalia remains an enigma to him and to most of those whom he consults. Near the end of his absorbing portrayals of her in the book, one sees in the concluding reflection a probing concern but a surface understanding in relation to the true Mahalia Jackson:

She wrestled with the two Mahalas she had become: The powerful public one with fits of anger, ruthless, unthinking; the other, lonely in the condominium, hours on the phone with her second husband, even though they were divorced; and when John was there to help her maintain the apartments and cook soul food for her, she complained of nightmares, would come looking for him at night, way in the far side of the huge apartment, and they talk about the good old days: his boyhood, the beginnings—when he slept between her and Ike—the days of music and struggle for recognition.

Although Schwerin here gives an impression, borne out by the preceding analytical materials of the book, it is clear to anyone who probes deeper