

BLACK MUSIC, RACIAL IDENTITY, AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE
SPIRITUALS AND THE BLUES

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Diallo Mamadou D.
May 2013

Thesis Approvals:

Molefi Kete Asante, Thesis Advisor, African American Studies Department, Temple University

Diane Turner, Committee Member, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University

Abstract

African American Music has always served to document the history of enslaved Africans in America. It takes its roots in African spirituality and originally pervades all aspects of African life. That Music has been transformed as soon as it got on this side of the Atlantic Ocean in a context of slavery and oppression. As historical documents, Black Music has served African Americans to deal with their experience in America from slavery to freedom. This work studies how Black Spirituals and the Blues have played a tremendous role in building an African American identity and in raising race consciousness in an oppressed people in a perpetual quest for freedom and equal rights in America.

Acknowledgements

There are certain individuals with whom I have interacted with through these years and who have provided me with inspiration and encouragement during my quest for documenting and preserving information about the history of the music of African American people. After having spent many years researching and assembling information on the history of Black people in America and working on the archives of Molefi Kete Asante Institute as well as of the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, I have arrived at the point where I feel that the interest and the loyalty of African-centered people will help me better direct my research into the twenty-first century and towards posterity with a new perspective. I express my deeply felt gratitude to the Charles L. Blockson African American Collection's personnel, especially to Doctor Diane Turner who provided me with invaluable articles and books which have immensely impacted the orientation of my research. I also thank Leslie Willis-Lowry who in her training me as Assistant Archivist has allowed me to have access to invaluable documents on African American history and culture. The number of people I have talked to and who have availed themselves of their documents on Black music and Black history has increased at a considerable and overwhelming rate every day going from teachers, librarians, writers, activists, historians, Graduate and Undergraduate students, High School students coming to visit the Charles L. Blockson African American Collection, and people of different professional backgrounds. I also express my sincere gratitude to the Molefi Kete Asante Institute's Director, Professor Asante and his wife Ana Asante for their support and guidance since my arrival in the United States and for availing the resources of the Molefi Kete Asante's Institute to me.

I send my gratitude to Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) who allowed me to interview him in his house in Newark, New Jersey. He is a great reference to me. I associate in my acknowledgements African Americans of all social background and Americans of all races and creeds I interviewed or interacted with for the purpose of my research. Temple University African American Department and its students have played an important role in allowing me to find the intellectual, social and psychological space to conduct my study. For these reasons, I say thank you. It is exciting and gratifying to see how many people of all races and creeds have shared the interest of my research project from my home country in Senegal to the United States.

I always believe and say I am only an element in the chain of African history pioneers in my lifetime trying to leave my imprint for future generations to know who they are and what their people have achieved for them. For that purpose, I am seeking dedicated people to help me achieve my goal which is only a drop of water into the sea compared to the titanic works that have been done by some of our greatest people such as Amiri Baraka, Molefi Asante, Charles L. Blockson, and Diane Turner in terms of preserving our holdings, when it was harder to do research and to find willing people to support you. I want these African-centered people to help me nurture our holdings for future generations to come. These are people who love themselves, love their people, are dedicated to their people and share the desire to assist in the worthwhile cause for human endeavor.

Mamadou D. Diallo

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INTRODUCTION

During my four years of research in the Ph. D. program which started in 2009 at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal, I have gathered a new and well-documented body of work and material on the political and social history and culture of African American and Black Diaspora music for which I would like to create new scholarship based on an African-centered paradigm of thought and foster a new vision of culture studies at the Higher Education level. This present thesis works in direct line with the same project. An African-centered research project on the origins and present state of African American music and its political, social and religious implications in the processes of African Americans' search for historical consciousness and for an African identity is of a tremendous importance for me. Centeredness is a claiming for agency which is a God given attribute. The more people can define their ethnicity, their identity and their cultural origins, the more they strengthen community ties and participate in a more globalized world because it is in accepting their cultural differences and respecting one another that a diverse and better world can be built . For such an agency to be gained, Black people should tell their own history using an Afrocentric perspective. Molefi Kete Asante said:

An Afrocentric view of African history is written from the standpoint of people as subjects of human experiences. One of the cardinal truths in Afrocentricity is the fact that ancient Kemet was a Black African civilization.

Like Diop, Afrocentrists claim a Black origin of Egypt and a Black influence on the civilization of Europe.¹

One's self-consciousness will never be raised without one knowing his/her history and culture. Collective consciousness which is one of the fundamental African cultural traits, and community ties cannot be strengthened unless Black people in the world understand what binds them together culturally and the challenges awaiting them in this modern world. My research reveals that black music is that link that unites Black people. Black people cannot deal with modernity and move forward without relying on the history of their people. There are very rich collections of, sometimes, contradictory statements about the music of African Americans, but the problem is to know if all sources are equally qualified to talk about African-American history. A broad literary review will help us see a set of works that have been done on Black music and its implication in building self-pride, identity, and Black Consciousness for Black people in America. But I assert that an Afrocentric paradigmatic exploitation of my sources suits more to my objectives of giving a positive and worthy account of African musical history. I have always been concerned with working to bridge cross-cultural boundaries for a better understanding and acceptance between people of different cultures and ethnic groups. Most conflicts and subhuman treatments like slavery are sustained by racial stereotypes. In this modern world, prejudices are still a hindrance to cultural integration between people of different origins. Conflicts and racial prejudice have greatly contributed to perpetuate the cult of white supremacy in America and Europe that regards African Americans and Africans in general as people of a subculture.

¹ Molefi Kete Asante. 2007. *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press. P. 81.

I think that one of the ultimate tasks of any Black scholar is the obligation to teach the history of Black people in general. Having spent many years researching and assembling information on the history of Black people in America and working on the archives of the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection for several months as well as participating in lectures and working in the archives of the Molefi Kete Asante Institute, I have arrived at the point where I feel that the interest and loyalty of my mentors and colleagues will help me better direct my research into this twenty-first century and towards posterity with a stronger and clearer perspective. My choice to research African American music came from a class I took for my Advanced degree in English Studies. The class which was entitled “Life on the Plantations” which dealt with the way enslaved Africans were treated, subdued, and how they worked hard from dawn to dusk for their masters in enduring conditions. By the same token, their culture and any attempt to revive their African traditions were banned by the white people they worked for. My curiosity was then raised to research more about the part enslaved Africans’ music played as historical documents in the fight for liberation from oppression. Black music holding the history of black people in America is the hypothesis on which my research is based. First of all, I would like my work to contribute to a body of work, ideas and data that would satisfy scholars in the fields of Music Studies and African-American history. My aim is to open new doors for further research in the history of African-American music based on an African-centered paradigm that will take my work as point of departure.

In addition to that, my thesis should speak meaningfully to members of African-American society of the new generation and Diaspora people with a slave past and to Black people internationally, insofar as these are the people who must ultimately judge if we, scholars and researchers talking about their history, have understood what they understand. Black music is so diversified now that we have Black people all around the world that it will be difficult to define what black music is without leaving one aspect out. But our aim is to focus on what all genres have in common: their African roots. Kenneth M. Dossar states in his essay “Transforming from the Soul: African-Based Music in the Americas”:

The development of African-based music in the Americas has had a pervasive and profound impact on culture throughout the world. *Samba, calypso, reggae, bomba, salsa, rumba, cumbia, blues, jazz, hip-hop*, and other African-derived music emerged from new world African cultures.²

This expansion and variety of African-originated music has created a very rich and complex heritage of African aesthetics and religious practices in music, dances, and percussion that witnesses the richness of African culture. But it is important to deal with the circumstances in which African musical art was transformed. Slavery is the context in which such music has been created with oppression as the basis of its development. For many centuries, Africans were abducted, uprooted and involuntarily transported across the ocean, and sold to work as slaves on plantations in the Americas, mainly in Brazil and the Caribbean islands. In the United States the slave system was mainly sustained in the South and enslaved Africans were maintained under control by laws called Slave Codes and by an oppressive patrolling system.

The system worked well enough that millions of slaves remained in bondage for 246 years in America. It worked poorly enough that increasingly restrictive Slaves Codes had to be written to keep the human property under control.

² Diane Turner. 2011. *Feeding the Soul: Black Music, Black Thought*. Chicago: Third World Press. P. 3.

Slaves must not be allowed to read and write. Slaves must not be allowed to buy and sell merchandise. They must be no gun, no riding horses without permission, no gambling, no liquor, no preaching of holding religious services or other meetings, no slandering a free white person, no insolence to a free white person- the list grew longer with each new Code.³

Brutally cut from their cultural ties and being accustomed to certain social realities in Africa, they tried to link their new life experience to their traditions. Songs and dances had been a particular marker in this cultural rebirth but they took on a new meaning as they were ultimately linked to their lives in bondage. The label of songs of sorrow coined by W. E. B. Du Bois gives us a clear message about the true meaning of the songs and the African Americans' determination to free themselves from oppression using those songs. William E. B. Du Bois said:

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 weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine.⁴

The account Du Bois made about the music of the Africans show that these sorrow songs came from Africa and they existed in America as a continuation of a historical process. He inherited these songs before he started writing about them. The music reflected the mood of the enslaved Africans who used to sing about their unbearable conditions, their discontentment, and their longing for freedom. The enslaved Africans brought with them sounds of their ancestors linked to percussion instruments, songs, dances, cult celebration, and a world view as they came ashore to the New World. Polyrhythm and work songs were part of their heritage.

³ Belinda Hurmence. 1999. *My Folks Don't Want Me To Talk About Slavery*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, Publisher. P. x.

⁴ William E. B. Du Bois. 1990. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Vintage Books/ The Library of America. P. 180.

But the songs they brought were transformed in a context of bondage. As the enslaved labored on the fields, the music became a way of adapting to a new language, a new religion, and to a difficult way of life first, but in a context of oppression, that music also created a new meaning that was built around an ideology of liberation. They sang to have solace and try to heal themselves from wounds. Very often, the songs were a means to communicate with each other and express their trouble and hopes for a better life. The music followed the freedmen while they moved from the plantations to a new life of freedom after the 13th Amendment was ratified in 1865 and during the period of Reconstruction. As Black people faced the reality of promised unfulfilled freedom, injustice, inequality, and discrimination and white brutality, the spirituals, which were songs of sorrow as W.E.B. Du Bois said, were transformed into the Blues; they reflected the mood of the Black man struggling with the horror of lynching, Jim Crow laws, economic deprivation and exploitation, migration, and racial profiling among other problems. When enslaved Africans were set free by the 13th Amendment, they became scattered throughout the country trying to find a way to make a living. Disfranchisement and Jim Crow Laws gave the bluesmen and women themes to deal with and a new page on Black people's history to document. The blues singer with his songs, his language and lyrics, with his moaning solo guitar castigates his own oppression that of his people and the system which puts him in such a situation of perpetual displacement, family dislocation, poverty, social and political rights deprivation, and love lost. The weight of oppression and subjugation seems to follow him and his race through time and space. The blues becomes an African American identity, language, literary imagination, and a call to fight and live up to the ideal and promises of freedom and equality for all. These themes have been broadly documented by Black Nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Early expression of Black Nationalism came from nineteenth century Black spokesmen in their crusade for freedom and an urge to respond to the American Colonization Society politics to send free Negroes back to the West Coast of Africa. One of the supporters of the emigration project was Martin R. Delany who opposed white support to the National Negro Convention of 1831. He advocated separation or emigration to Africa.

Delany looked at the positions Black leaders held in American body politics and concluded that Black people had no viable part to play in it. According to him, “black people were “politically not of them, but aliens to the laws and political privileges of the country. These are truths – fixed facts that quaint theory and exhausted moralizing are impregnable to, and fall harmlessly before.”⁵ Henry Highland Garnet had a more radical stand. He was a revolutionary who advocated violence. Having escaped slavery with his parents in 1824, he belonged the younger generation of black leaders, doubled with a preacher, who gave a new tone to Negro argument, according to Robert C. Dick.⁶ These important resistance strategies have inspired present and future generations of young African Americans who throughout their experience since slavery to present time in America, have suffered permanent sacrifice, humiliation, oppression of all kinds, and have always put an emphasis of fighting for freedom, justice and equality. Freedom seemed to be an illusion after the ratification of the 13th Amendment that marked the freeing of slaves, and seemed to be the ultimate reference for White Americans to live up to the history of this country. By the same token, they sealed the fate of the Black Man in a binary existence of Black and White America that defines any achievement for white people but put barriers for any attempt for black people to live the American ideal of freedom and equal opportunity. My thesis will try to document the historical transformations and political meanings of the spirituals and the blues from plantation life to the fourth decade of twentieth century, precisely in the 1940s. Many fundamental, broad, and interconnected questions will help me frame my analysis and deal with the pending issue of the role of music in the development of African American social, cultural, and political history. How do we conceptualize, sub-divide, and study African-American music and its political role from the enslaved Africans’ spirituals to the Blues? How has it been interpreted in American popular culture through its history? How do African Americans express their understanding of their experience through music in a multicultural environment? What can they get as positive from their double consciousness as Black and as American? How does this double consciousness reflect in their music? Finally, what role the spirituals and the Blues played in raising Black

⁵ Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*. P. 66, cited by Robert C. Dick(1974). *Black Black Protest: Issues and Tactics*. Greenwood Press. P. 23.

⁶ Robert C,Dick. 1974. *Black Black Protest: Issues and Tactics*. Greenwood Press.

Consciousness and the building of an African-American identity? These are among others some of the guiding questions dealing with political and social aspects of Black music that will sustain our study. The setting and the historical context used in this study will be the ante-bellum slavery system for the spirituals and the ratification of the 13th Amendment and its aftermath during the Reconstruction period in creating a climate of brutality and horrors with the rise of Jim Crow laws, with the Plessey vs Fergusson case that impacted the Blues songs and Blues men and women. Our aim is to study how Africans using their music historically, socially, and politically reacted to bondage and later to unfulfilled dreams of freedom and emancipation, but also to migration and drastic living conditions. From the early signs of protest music in satirized songs, work songs, and the spirituals, to new forms of protest in the blues, jazz, and more recently hip hop, whether orally sung or written, African-Americans have always been concerned with issues of racial identity and social equality. They have tried to prove that the race question doesn't exist separate and distinct from the relentless search for full citizenship in the American society. Their commitment to uplifting the black race is intrinsically linked to the attempt to improve their social, cultural, moral and material conditions. Historically, African Americans have used their music to address some of the most compelling socio-political issues, and some of these questions are race, identity, and black consciousness. Generally speaking, the more a genre or type of musical expression draws its musical, poetic, and religious inspiration from Christian chants, the more it has been appreciated and legitimized by American Christian-based society because westerners have always tried to relate black spirituals to a Christian origin. Conversely, the more it strays from that model and takes secular form or related to African traditions, the more susceptible it has been liable to correction and rejection by an alert community's aesthetic conscience or to assignment it to a lower level of approval and appreciation. But black spirituals have an African origin. Amiri Baraka said:

“The spirit will not descend without a song.” This is an old African dictum that very necessarily was incorporated into Afro-Christian worship. The Negro church, whether Christian or “heathen,” has always been a “church of emotion.”

In Africa, ritual dances and songs were integral parts of African religious observances, and the emotional frenzies that were usually concomitant with any African religious practices have been pretty well documented, though, I would suppose, rarely understood.⁷

African American music of all genres has suffered all kinds of degrading attributes that have connoted racism and discrimination. Those bad labels put on Black music were also a pretext to put black musicians out of economic competition in the music industry. This leads us to deal with the part Christianity has played in legitimizing the slave system and Jim Crow laws. In fact, from participating in slave auctions for church charity to transforming the Christian gospel to teach enslaved African to be obedient to their masters, the White Church has never been neutral to the oppressive system in America. It has actively participated in slavery, racism, Jim Crow laws and segregation. The White Church has condoned the separation of churches into white and black because of its racially oriented views of religion.

In the racial struggle, there is revealed the same pattern of tardiness, apathy, non-commitment, and outright opposition by the church... Indeed, the history of the race struggle in the United States has been to a considerable extent the history of the Protestant rapport with the status quo. From the beginning, it was the church that put its blessing on slavery and sanctioned a caste system that continues to this day.⁸

Therefore, the Black Church cannot but be racially oriented and actively involved in fighting for equal rights and justice.

⁷ Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka). 2002. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: Harper/Perennial. P. 41.

⁸ James Cone. 1997. *Black Theology and Black Power*. New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

The Black Church cannot be neutral in response to the already created division and segregated religious venues and complacent White Church as James Cone says. The Black Church is one that is committed to struggle against injustice.

Many black intellectuals have understood the vital issue of cultural awareness and have contributed a lot in teaching their communities. For instance, as a student of history himself, Malcolm X can be taken as an archetype; he is a leader of Black Liberation and a reference point, a spiritual advisor in presence and in absentia for Black Power activists. He influenced many of the cultural nationalists and Black Power activists nationwide of the 1960s onward. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially following Spike Lee's 1990 film on Malcolm X, the young hip hop generations looked to the latter for great inspiration. During Malcolm X's life time, he knew that history was best qualified to reward researchers, and he strongly believed that African and African American history were central to the formation of African American collective identity. He was deeply convinced about the significance of Black history in African American people's fight for freedom and emancipation. Music was and still plays a very important part of this fight as it has always addressed all aspects of African American life. This function of music as a keeper of a people's history has been the key heritage of Africans in America. African-American music is deeply rooted in African culture. Miles Mike Fisher said:

The chief concern of African music was to recite the history of the people. In the Sudan this task was assumed by professional musicians who formed associations to make money out of the people. Among the Wolofs, a Sudanese tribe, bands of singers recited family and national history to the accompaniment of musical instruments.

They might be men or they might be women, but they were all professional storytellers, magicians, gossipmongers, and musicians.⁹

Most of the African music was used as a way to document the history of African people. Knowing the function Black music played in the fight for freedom can help African Americans build self-consciousness, self-pride, and have a strong sense of their history from Africa to America, hence the importance to learn about their past through music. African-American music is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of music and musical genres emerging from or influenced by the culture of African Americans. The latter have long constituted a large and significant ethnic minority of the United States' population. Many of their ancestors were originally brought to North America to be enslaved. They brought with them typical polyrhythmic songs originating from several black African ethnic groups across West and sub-Saharan Africa. In the United States, as people lived together, multiple cultural practices merged with influences from European music such as Christian revival hymns. But the core of African American musical practices came from their African traditions as we will use documentation to back our hypothesis later. In later periods, considerable innovations and changes occurred with the use of modern instruments and musical techniques. African-American genres have been greatly influential across socio-economic and racial groupings, internationally meeting with tremendous popularity on a global level. African-American music and broadly speaking African-American culture are duly celebrated during Black History Month in February of each year in the United States for this respect. This aspect shows the determination of a people to remain original in keeping their traditions.

⁹ Miles Mike Fisher. 1990. *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*. Carol Publishing Group Edition. P. 1.

The influence of African-American culture on mainstream American music began in the 19th century, with the advent of black minstrelsy. The banjo, which is of African origin, became a popular instrument, and its African-derived rhythms were incorporated into popular songs by Stephen Foster and other songwriters. In the 1830's, the Second Great Awakening led to a rise in Christian revivals and pietism, mainly among African Americans. Drawing on traditional work songs, enslaved Africans originated and began performing a wide range of Spirituals and other Christian songs mixed with African religious traditions which were preserved despite many restrictions and an attempt from the white masters to erase that heritage. In fact, in the eighteenth century, many laws had been created in many southern states to ban African cult celebrations and the use of African percussive instruments by Black people. As a response, many of African songs bore coded messages of subversion against slaveholders and patrollers because they signaled escape, called for secret meetings or indicted the oppressors for violation of Black people's rights. For example, enslaved Africans talked about their living and working conditions and the exploitation of their work by their oppressors:

We raise the wheat, dey gib us de corn;

We bake de bread, dey gib us de crust;

We sif de meal, dey gib us de huss;

We peal de meat, dey gib us de skin;

And dats de way dey takes us in.

We skims de pot, dey gib us de liquor,

An' say, "dats good enough fer a nigger."

Anonymous¹⁰

Black music developed as a way to communicate all aspects of Black people's life based on African oral traditions because cultural expression and benefit were denied to African American through centuries. In fact, through slavery, in which they were forbidden to be taught to read and write, and, later, under the segregated system, the African Americans had been prevented from receiving the full benefits of literacy and the knowledge it offered. They have carried on the struggle against this continued exclusion of their race from the culture based on written texts. Frederick Douglass, for example, like other authors of slave narratives, set out with great hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read and write, because when he knew to read and write, he became even more discontent with slavery and liberate himself. But not all enslaved or African American was as lucky as he was. The broader mass remained illiterate and low class citizens. Music was an important tool to communicate and to orally transmit the history of African Americans from one generation to the other as they were kept away from learning to read and write by slaveholders. Maurice Delafosse posited:

In any case, it is great fortune for science that, in the countries generally devoid of the aid of writing, there exists such an institution, thanks to which the important facts of history, the origins of tribes, the details of customs and beliefs have been preserved in the memory of man. And it is curious to note that people reputed to be ignorant and barbarous have found a means to take the place of libraries by supporting amongst themselves successive generations of living books, each one of which adds to the heritage it received from the precedent. These so-called savages have at their call, historical compendiums and codes just

¹⁰ Mel Watkins. 1940. *Laughing, Lying, and Signifying...: The Underground tradition of African-American humor*. New York: Simon & Schuster, C1994. P. 46.

as we have, only it is in the cerebral convolutions of their traditionalist griots, and not on paper, that their laws are imprinted.¹¹

In the case of the African Americans during their enslavement period, the majority of the community's prohibition from writing was forced upon them by law. Therefore, they continued a tradition of keeping their history alive for posterity from their African heritage. And their music was and still is a tremendous means in that process. It would be interesting to track down the evolution of African-American music through time and space in order to understand its tradition of protest using oral means. In discussing this seminal role of African and their descendants in the development of the economies of the Atlantic world, economic historian, Joseph Inikori, notes that a fundamental problem in scientific discussion concerning the economics of the Atlantic slave trade and African slavery in the Americas has been conceptual. Using appropriate theories in order to pose the right questions, to identify relevant evidence to see, and interpret facts correctly is, he says, the real basis of empirical research. This seemingly obvious observation leads him to conclude that the African presence in the economic history of the Atlantic world has been rendered invisible by theories and perspectives that have focused attention on other issues of mere interests.

Discussion of the origins of the modern economies of the Atlantic world have simply neglected to mention that it was Africans and their descendants who paid with their lives the highest price of this development by providing the involuntary and unremunerated labor, both skilled and unskilled, that made it possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

¹¹ Maurice Delafosse. 1931. *The Negro of Africa*, trans. F. Fligleman, Washington D.C., p. 269-271. Cited in Miles Mike Fisher. *Opcit.* p. 2.

As far as African-Americans' history is concerned, music can be taken as sad thoughts, sorrow experiences sung or danced out. Therefore it has several meanings which are understood by those who have undergone the same experiences. J. H. Kwabena Nketia's book *The Music of Africa* (1974) will help us clarify the extensive range of indigenous musical resources in Africa, the various musical traditions African people have in common, specific cultural aspects that are significant to some people and finally the influence this music has on African American artistic heritage. Different cultures surely share some practices because of cross-cultural interactions. Meanwhile every culture has its distinctive markers. These specific features make a people's identity. Music is one of these markers for African Americans. Their music in its conception, manifestation, social and historical origins and performance is an aspect that shows how the ties that bound them to their African origins are strong. W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) retraces the political, social, economic, and cultural history of African-American through their music. It studied the evolution of black music through the history of African American people, saying which songs are Africans', which ones are American, and which ones are fake tunes created by white Americans to imitate and appropriate black culture. Du Bois also linked black music to the economic striving of the freedmen after the ratification of the 13th Amendment in what he called the Black Belt in the South. Protest, indictment for human right violation, for rape, for abandonment, for economic exploitation and cultural oppression has always been at the root of African American music. In their seminal work, *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (1974), Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame compare the humane character of slavery in Africa and the horror African Americans suffered during the slave trade. So

African Americans developed a culture from their African legacy which permeated their folklore, dances, language, religion and so on. What characterizes every people is its history, and how modest this history could be, it is possible to discover it by an appropriate investigation. Mary Frances' and John Blassingame's book is an attempt to discover this past, to show that African legacy and slavery are central to understanding the black experience in America and how their social and political thought was shaped through struggle for better life and education. A protest song is a song which is associated with a movement for social change and hence part of the broader category of topical songs or songs connected to current events. It may be folk, classical, or commercial in genre. But in the African-American history of an oppressed people, protest is intrinsically related to expression of cultural nationalism at its core, and of self-determination.

Lawrence Levine's book *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (1978) has extensively dealt with those songs in the enslavement period. It is a good reference that can help understand different themes addressed by enslaved Africans and the meaning they gave to their songs. From the days of chattel slavery until today, the concept of travel has been inseparably linked in the mind of African American people to the concept of freedom.

This is interesting in that the blues singers from 1965 to the 1940's era have shared their attachment to mobility and have sung the difficulties related to migration and new settlement. In Walter Dean Myers's "The Blues of Flats Brown", Flats, the main trickster, is also the quintessential blues performer who experiences the pain of brutality, maintains his humanity and transcends his experiences with a comic lyricism.

Through Flats, the main protagonist's blues, there is an awareness of experienced pain, and an ability to confront and move past dirty, lowdown meanness of life represented by

Grubbs who incarnates the symbol of white oppression. Protest has always been a catalyst for change. It is the cornerstone of America's own birth. In fact, the first immigrants help America take the first steps to greatness when they long ago protested against oppression of their native government and established new edicts promoting the ideals of freedom and opportunity.

But interestingly, the same people who prized freedom so much denied it to Black people by creating loopholes in the American constitution. Since the first Africans were forced on board a ship bound for this continent and enslaved, protest has been a major motif in the African American experience. It was a critical weapon during the enslavement of Africans, and during the ranging violence against Blacks following the end of Reconstruction, the Jim Crow years, and against the deplorable conditions of the ghettos in the North. *Angela Davis' Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, (1998) is a resourceful reference to the role female black blues singers like Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday played as one of the precursors of black feminist thought and radicalism. Throughout history the blues has been used to combat economic and political oppression, racism, discrimination, and exclusion from mainstream America. Amiri Baraka's *Blues People: Black Music in White America* (2002 Edition) is another radical work or expression of cultural nationalism using music as a medium for protest and alternative voice for struggle. Icons of African American protest reveal the extraordinary strength, courage, and sacrifice displayed by individuals for the cause of freedom, self-determination and civil rights. Diane Turner's *Feeding the Soul: Black Music, Black Thought* (2011) explores African origins of American music and aesthetics and the commitment and activism of Jazz musicians like Duke Ellington to retell the history of

black people through his music. She deals with the important part African-based music played in America and the diaspora in general, and the different kinds of music that originated from that music. Diane Turner's book also explores the healing power and process in black music and how it has common ground with an old African practice of using music, dances and percussive drumming in methods of healings and feeding the soul. Mark Fisher in *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (1953) contends that the spirituals are "historical documents" that tell us about the Black people liberation movements in America. According to him, Black people in their music try to define themselves and their present history in the light of a more promising future and not according to their current miseries. Another point raised by Fisher is the constant longing for escape always present in the spirituals. This point contradicts the assertion that black spirituals are mostly otherworldly. Fisher's book, first published in 1953 (I am using a Carol Publishing Group Edition of 1990) is a good reference to present the black spirituals as the first expression of black identity and black consciousness. James Cone, in *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), associates the power of Black music with black struggle for liberation and survival. For him, black music is the foundation of black freedom movement and he makes a good case in linking the gospel, the black spirituals, and black suffering. Cone states that in a situation of political and economic disfranchisement, Black people found their spiritual composure creating psychological and spiritual power in songs that transcend the reality of slavery and governmental decisions. In this sense, when Black people seemed powerless in linking their songs to their existing reality, the spirituals became a-historical because they were given a new meaning by transferring them in an otherworldly future.

The spirituals then became a moving reality that look forwards and found black liberation in God's judgment and punishment of the evil-doer, to mean the white oppressors. But a common point Cone argument has compared to Fisher's view is that black spirituals whether historical or a-historical documents, are based and centered on the same contexts which are slavery and oppression. Spirituals are defined and created according to the black experience in slavery according to Mark Fisher and James Cone and the tremendous role they played in building a black consciousness of political resistance has always been a constant reality.

Their point of view seems to demonstrate that Black Spirituals started the Black Power ideologies embedded in Black music and which were manifested in different strategies by Black political leaders through centuries of struggle. These two books will be my guiding reference documents for this study. Black musicians and their songs have greatly contributed to the political fight for freedom and justice in the United States. Our aim is to focus on the black experience in the fight for equal rights and justice, and the contribution of black musicians in the history of the freedom struggle.

METHODOLOGY

In order to reach my goal in the study of Black music, the following methodology will be adopted. I will use an Afrocentric approach to deconstruct theories of the western origins of black spirituals and to establish my theory of black music as an African property but not an appropriation. The term "deconstruction," like "postmodernism," has taken on many meanings in the popular imagination.

However, in philosophy, it signifies certain strategies for reading and writing texts. The term was introduced into philosophical literature in 1967, with the publication of three texts by Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (English 1974), *Writing and Difference* (English 1978), and *Speech and Phenomena* (English 1973). The periods that will be looked at are:

- From 1740 to 1867 for the spirituals;
- And from 1863 to the 1940s century for the blues.

This study will be divided in two major parts.

The first part will look for the meaning of the spirituals as the expression of black identity and black consciousness in a context of slavery. This part will be dealt with in two chapters as follows:

- In Chapter One, I deem it necessary to talk first about Africa's social organization, folk beliefs, and the role music played in traditional African society. I relate African traditions to African Americans' life in the New World after the transplantation in order to help the reader have a better understanding of black slave music and its true meaning. By avoiding misunderstanding African-Americans' attitude towards music, this approach will help readers deal with the topic more accurately and know what it meant for an oppressed people to use music in their quest for freedom through centuries of oppression and subjugation and how that music has been transformed from Africa to America.
- The Second Chapter of our study will explore the tremendous role Negro spirituals played in the history of black music and culture during the enslavement period. The

choice of the South is motivated by the fact that it was the main setting of slavery in America a symbol of homeland for African Americans and many songs are related to it. Call-and-response, field hollers, ring shouts, satirical songs, lullabies, songs in animal tricksters, these are some of the traditions that helped enslaved Africans to culturally survive in the New World. With Christianity, a unique kind of song grew from the experience of the Africans: the Spirituals. They originated from the South before the Civil War in a slavery system context. We are using a historically documented approach to state the African origin of the Negro spiritual and their evolution. Music has been a tremendous arm in African American fight to achieve political, social, economic and cultural development and to remain a community with its specificities while integrating the American society's common goal that is unity in diversity. We will try to demonstrate that music was in the past and still is a way of expressing black consciousness started with the spirituals. The second part of this work deals the Blues and the part music can play in designing curricula in Black Studies.

- Chapter Three will deal with the African Americans and the Blues experiences from 1863 to 1940. Linking the Blues to an era of Jim Crow laws, lynching and migration for better conditions will help me clarify the impact of these contexts on the black people fight for freedom, for building an identity based on their experience, and how black consciousness was expressed through their music.
- It will explore the way the Emancipation Proclamation and the years of Reconstruction impacted the birth of the blues, and the way the Black man felt to be both African and American and how this dual identity is expressed through the blues.

- Chapter Four will end my study investigating the role and influence Black Spirituals and the Blues narratives can have in building curricula of Black Studies for African Americans to teach historical consciousness as well as to address political issues in African Americans' long quest for freedom. For this purpose I will use an Afrocentric approach such as Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentricity that expresses Black Cultural Nationalism in an updated view. The same theory will be used to center the present life of African Americans in African perspective and to critique the educational gap between Blacks and Whites. Afrocentric approaches of Black music can help build a strong African American identity and raise black consciousness among African Americans by learning their history.

CHAPTER 1

THE AFRICAN AMERICANS' MUSICAL HERITAGE

1. African American Music and Its African Social Life Legacy

Up to the era of western invasions, the majority of African people used to worship local divinities. The best way to define earliest traditional African religion is to see it as a cult of the ancestors. Africans used to believe in their departed ancestors' unlimited power on their lives. That is why the nuclear family had a paramount importance in religion and in the society. The spirit shrine is central to the traditional African religious life. Robert Baum said:

An individual could become an adept of the spirit shrine by inheriting a shrine associated with his or her lineage; through spiritual calls of afflictions, dreams, or visions; or by being selected by the elders of a particular cult. Parents could establish a relationship between their child and a spirit shrine, which would protect the child. Father Sene described this as well: the children are consecrated at birth to one of the local spirit; the ceremony is done through the offering of a steer, or a pig, a dog, or a chicken, according to the resources of the family. The victim is sacrificed and the blood is spread over a kind of butte in the sacred sanctuary, with libation of palm wine.¹²

The cult of the ancestors placed the oldest men of the society in the first rank in terms of hierarchy. In fact, the patriarch of each family, apart from being the leader, is entitled the role of a preacher. As they were the oldest descendants of the initial ancestor, therefore, they inherited all his earthly prerogatives.

¹² Robert Baum. 1999. *Shrines of the Slave Trade*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 163.

They had tremendous domination on their people. The patriarchs used to preside over the destinies of the members of their respective family. They were a kind of link between the dead and the living. A patriarch was believed to be able to communicate with the souls of the deceased ancestors on one hand, and on the other to have a secret and mystical hold on the natural forces which surrounded the immediate environment of the family. He had full rights to lead the family religious meetings and ceremonies. Any edifice that fitted the purpose could be used as sanctuaries. Sanctuaries used to host sacred objects: dead people's bones, bits of wood, stones, consecrated fragments of metal and cultural effigies.

Baum added:

Near each village, in the center of the forest, and almost always around an ordinary tree, that was made sacred, are raised a palisade enclosing a sanctuary: it is the residence of the tutelary spirit called the name of "boekine." The men have theirs, the women as well.... The boekine is the supreme resource: for the farmer who wishes an abundant harvest, for the young woman who wishes to become a mother.... A Diola who is sick or threatened by a fatal portent quickly has recourse to the boekine.¹³

Music backed any such ceremony with songs that fitted the moment, hand clapping, ring shouts and so on. *Hand bells and hand rattles were used to invoke the spirits and to summon the disciples.*¹⁴ During those secular rites, Africans used to sacrifice to their divinities the blood of killed goats, chicken, sheep or even that of human beings in order to have their favor or to ask them to ward off evil. Sometimes, offerings could be libations such as palm wine or millet beer.

¹³ Robert Baum. Ibid. p. 163.

¹⁴ John Hope Franklin. 1984. *de l'esclavage a la liberte : histoire des Afro-Américains*. Paris. p. 26

Praying and incantations were also part of religious rites. The sacred and the secular are not separated in traditional African religion and they had a practical function. Melva Wilson Costen contended:

In traditional African cultures, life is not compartmentalized or segmented into sacred or religious realms. Life is viewed and lived holistically, with music functioning in a variety of ways. Religious beliefs and practices are expressed and transmitted orally through actions that govern daily existence in various societies.¹⁵

Apart from these religious beliefs, African people gave a lot of credit to magic. They believed in the powers of talismans, snuffboxes, and other objects of protection. Everything that could help to explain the imponderables and to oppose them was used to enrich the tribal patrimony. That is a reason why the practice of magic was widespread, and it was the domain of the sorcerer. By invoking those non defined powers which he was the only one to understand, the sorcerer used to invent techniques and to create rites to satisfy individuals' specific needs. Here also the ceremonies used to be backed by percussive drums, singing and trancelike performances. The very practices some writers witnessed in slaves' communities in the South of the United States of America during the enslavement period. Costen added:

African American sacred music traditions are rooted in the primal worldviews of African religions. The plural reference to religious is a reminder that the continent of Africa is not only huge but represents more than a thousand different societies, each with its own religious system. Religion is the strongest element in ancient cultural traditions and probably exerted the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of African people. Traditional religions pervade all aspects of life, thereby eliminating a formal distinction between the sacred and the secular.

¹⁵ Melva Wilson Costen. 1993. *In Spirit and in Truth*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. P. 8.

Since this holistic religious worldview and other aspects of African belief systems are shared among the various societies, there is also a fundamental way of knowing, symbolizing, and conceptualizing that transcends social differences.¹⁶

Whereas religious ceremonies were a collective attempt to respond to the family group's needs, magic was an individual attempt to solve one's problems at a personal level. Even in religions where animist cults predominated, beliefs in magic were common. Almost all traditional Africans had strong attachments to magic powers and occult practices. Similar practices existed in the slave communities on the southern plantations in the United States of America. In fact voodoo ceremonies bore the same forms and performance as African magic. Enslaved Africans strongly believed in the divination powers of the medicine men of their communities. In the African concept religion and magic are interconnected. The slave religion was multifaceted and extremely eclectic in the African tradition. For more enslaved Africans, there was no unbridgeable gulf between their religious practices and magic. And even when they turn to Christianity, they still cling to their folk beliefs. Lawrence W. Levine says that:

The sacred world of the slaves was not confined to Christianity. There existed as well a network of beliefs and practices independent of yet strongly related to the slaves' formal religion. If religion is "that kind of behavior which can be classified as belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces" then the slaves' religion went beyond the creed of the Protestant denominations that converted them.

¹⁶ Melva W. Costen. *Ibid.* p. 1.

The slaves' sacred folk beliefs may not have been part of their formal religion, but they were religious beliefs nonetheless, and many slaves would have had some difficulty disentangling the web that bound their formal creed and their folk religion into an intelligible whole.¹⁷

There is a close connection between African traditional beliefs and the enslaved Africans' religious practices in the New World. In fact, if the slaves had accepted foreign religions without major difficulties it may be because first, they had predispositions and profound rootedness to religious practices, and second, they had the feeling that more gods would do no harm. On the contrary, it would bring supplementary guarantee to the fulfillment of their wishes and longing for escape and a better life, and to the solving of their daily problems. Living in very harsh conditions under slavery, they strongly believed the new religion would bring safety and help them be free from bondage. Another aspect of traditional Africa was their strong attachment to arts. Even if they spent most of their time and their energy trying to find solutions to their existential problems, they didn't neglect the aesthetic dimension of current life. The flavor for artistic research and expression pervaded their social activity. Painting and wood carving revealed a delicate sensitivity and a sense of beauty which showed deep love for what makes the attraction of life. African people used to take their time to embellish their products and to imprint on them the best of their talent and their artistic knowledge. Songs and dances were part and parcel of that artistic life and used to be backed with a set of string and percussion instruments. This great interest in arts was also visible in literature. As in all other enterprises, literary activities were closely linked to African people's daily life.

¹⁷ Lawrence W. Levine. 1978. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. New York. p.55

This oral literature: tales, proverbs, epics, historical narratives and coded language, was at the same time a means of education, a source of distraction, a guide for the ruling government in conducting the religious ceremonies. Speech and sound co-existed in all aspects of African life.

2. The Role of Music in African Oral Traditions

In traditional Africa, very few languages had a written form. This is the reason why literature, which was somehow abundant, was essentially oral. This oral literature was transmitted from one member to another in the same family and from one generation to the other. It was mainly composed of supernatural legends, moral tales, used to educate children, proverbs, epic poems, satires, love songs, funeral eulogies and comic stories. The specialists in the domain were griots or praise singers:

Their job was to collect texts in order to entertain the royal family as well as the ordinary families. They used to be singers, storytellers and troubadours. They were entitled the role of memories of their people's history, of the law and of the traditions. They were ambulant encyclopedias who were of great help to the community they belonged to.¹⁸

But the most striking thing when we consider Africa's traditional institutions very closely is the strong cohesion in the family group. The close family, the clan and the tribe used to constitute the stronghold of life in all domains taken. Performing groups and their music belonged to a family of community traditions.

¹⁸ John Hope Franklin. *Opcit.* 27.

In African societies, participation in music may be a voluntary activity or an obligation imposed by one's membership in a social group. Such a social group may be a descent group (a group of people who trace their ancestry back to the same person), or it may be any group based on the broader societal classification of age, sex, interest, or occupation. Where an African society is stratified, as, for example, the societies of the Hausa of Nigeria, and the Wolof of Senegambia, musical activity may be related to class structure.

In such societies, music making generally belongs to a social class of a low rank, and active participation usually takes place only on this level. The higher class is content to be entertained, or to leave the musical aspects of ritual and ceremonial occasions to professional musicians and others who assume musical roles in such contexts.¹⁹

Peace, stability and cohesion in a community were mainly due to the fact that, in every family, the members abode by the rules: respect to the elders and to the family deities, and community principles. Age or the authority of the patriarch was tremendous. The authority and the ascendance of the patriarch on other members of the family, to a large extent, guaranteed the stability which characterized African society in the past. Faithfulness and deep attachment of the individual to his family was almost veneration, and truly, these virtues were at the basis of most religious practices where the cult of the ancestors was so important.²⁰ People's beliefs were greatly influenced by their environment because Africans used to live in harmony with their natural milieu. The sacred rites were a means of expression for a people seeking with tenacity to find answers to unexplainable phenomena. The gods were not remote but were intrinsically linked to the people's day-to-day life and the latter strongly wanted their gods to show their divine power efficiently and practically by providing them with abundant crops and by protecting them against their enemies.

¹⁹ J. H. Kwabena Nketia. 1974. *The Music of Africa*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. P. 35.

²⁰ J. H. Frankin. *Opcit.* p. 29.

In fact for African people, there was no discontinuity between the divine and the living. The two entities were intertwined and lived in harmonious interactions which guaranteed the stability of the society. Robert Baum gives us an example of the functionality of the spirituals in traditional Africa. In Diola traditions, Emitae was addressed as a guardian of fertility, of good harvest, human fecundity, and abundant rain. Emitae assured the continuity of life from one generation to the other. And here is an example of a Diola spiritual in which different matters are addressed:

Atan Batun, Our Father,

It is You, who has made us,

As you made our ancestors,

As you made the boekine

As you made all that is,

We thank you.

Give us peace.

Give the rain that makes the rice paddies fertile.

Give us many children,

Who will come to honor you

And who will make us beautiful funerals.

Give us strength to farm.

Atan Batun, Our Father

You who made the boekine for us'

Make it so that they obey you.

As we obey you.

That our granaries will be full

That the bellies of our women will be fertile

That peace will reign among us

Atan Batun, you are our father.

We thank you.

We supplicate you,

Because without you, we could no longer exist.²¹

According to Diola traditional beliefs, Emitae created the spirit shrines and bestowed them with power to serve people. They are intermediaries between God and the humans and Emitae appears in many histories of the spirit shrines. Relating to African American spiritual heritage, we can see that spirituals existed a long time before Africans were deported to America and turned into slaves. What they did then was continuing this type of cult celebration which was then banned by the slaveholders. Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka) contends that:

The Christianity of the slave represented a movement away from Africa. It was the beginning of Africa as “a foreign place.” In the early days of slavery, Christianity’s sole purpose was to propose a metaphysical resolution for the slave’s natural yearning for freedom, and as such, it literally made life easier for him.

²¹ Robert Baum. Opcit. P. 43.

The secret African chants and songs were about Africa, and expressed the African slave's desire to return to the land of his birth. The Christian Negro's music became an expression of his desire to "cross Jordan" and see his Lord."²²

Therefore, the history of Negro Spirituals can still be retraced to their African roots in an attempt to contradict assertions that they were born from the American camp meeting hymns.

3. Slavery and the Transplantation of African Culture

African-American arts and music link the black American community to their African origins, but the question of the influence of Africa on African American culture has always divided thinkers. Scholars disagree whether the physical and cultural separation between Africans and their Americans and their American counterparts have led to completely new cultural traditions. Some of these specialists assert that, before and during slavery, there was nothing in Africa which looked like civilization. Therefore enslaved Africans could not have brought any such culture to America. Or even if there were any, since Africans were brutally cut from their origins and enslaved, they had lost all links with their authentic culture, thus they have inherited a Euro-American culture. Sociologists like E. Franklin Frazier and Robert E. Park have found nothing in the current life of African Americans which could be attributed to their African origins. Some have gone as far as enough asserting that Black people are not capable of building a civilization. John Baugh says:

²² Leroi Jones. *Opcit.* P. 39.

Collectively, the untutored Negro mind is confiding and single-hearted, naturally kind and hospitable. Both sexes are easily ruled, and appreciate what is good under the guidance of common justice and prudence. Yet where so much that honors human nature remain- in apathy the typical woolly-haired races have never invented a reasoned theological system, discovered an alphabet, framed a grammatical language, nor made the least step in science or art. They have never comprehended what they have learned, or retained a civilization taught them by contact with more refined nations as soon as that contact had ceased. They have at no time formed great political states, nor commenced a self-evolving civilization.²³

This demeaning account on African people and their traditions have long justified western aggressions on African people for centuries from slavery to colonization, to neo-colonization. One of such accounts is the book of Mecklin which was published in 1914. It deals with the Negro in the United States and is quoted by Herskovits. Mecklin said:

The most striking feature of the African Negro is the low forms of social organization, the lack of industrial and political cooperation, and consequently the almost entire absence of social and national self-consciousness. This rather than intellectual inferiority explained the lack of social sympathy, the presence of such barbarous institutions as cannibalism and slavery, the low position of woman, inefficiency in the industrial and mechanical arts, the low type of group morals, rudimentary art-sense, lack of race and self-assertiveness, and an intellectual and religious life largely synonymous with fetishism and sorcery.²⁴

Nevertheless, writers like Carter G. Woodson, Melville J. Herskovits and Lorenzo Turner defended the existence of an African culture and continuation of a cultural heritage, which is still discernible in numerous aspects of present day American life. Talking about the religious heritage of the African Americans, Herskovits posits:

²³ John Baugh. 1983. *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure, and Survival*. Austin: University of Texas Press. P. 13

²⁴ Melville J. Herskovits. 1990. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Beacon Press Boston. P. 59

The prominent place held by religion in the life of the Negro in the United States, and the special forms assumed by Negro versions of Christian dogma and ritual, are customarily explained as compensatory devices to meet the social and economic frustration experienced by Negroes during slavery and after emancipation.

Such explanations have the partial validity we have already seen them to hold for various phases of Negro secular life but, as must be emphasized again, cannot be regarded as telling the entire causal tale. For underlying the life of the American Negro is a deep religious bent that is but the manifestation here of the similar drive that, everywhere in Negro societies, makes the supernatural a major focus of interest.²⁵

In this sense, the spirituals have a social implication according to John Lovell. He thinks that slave songs were meant to build the social consciousness of enslaved Africans. Their songs were a reflection of their existence, of their African background, of their life on the southern plantations. The same social function, the songs also reflected black people's encounter with the slave auctioneers, slave masters, slave buyers, overseers, and of the harshness of daily life. They also dealt with the measures used to dehumanize black people in the name of Christianity.²⁶ The debate on the African origins of African American religious practices and culture in general has been launched in the sixties and seventies when several Black scholars and a few Euro-America started to contend that a great part of African culture has not only survived the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, but continues to influence many aspects American culture. Besides, William Bascom believes that the African origins of African American culture are unquestionable.

²⁵ M. J. Herskovits. Ibid. p. 206.

²⁶ John Lovell. 1969. "The Social Implications of the Negro Spirituals" in Bernard Katz (ed.), *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*. New York: Arno Press, P. 136. Cited by James Cone (1972), "The Spirituals and the Blues". New York: Maryknoll. Orbis Books. P. 13-14.

He backs his idea with a Yoruba myth from Nigeria which has sixteen versions across Cuba and Brazil. This is one example of proof that African American culture is not only rooted in Africa but has also resisted many external pressures to assert itself. The controversy is still persisting but it seems meanwhile possible to try to come to a conclusion concerning African American heritage. Coming from a complex economic and social system, enslaved Africans were terrorized but not crushed by the horrors of the slave system in America. Despite the diversity which characterized several aspects of African life, black slaves possessed a sufficient heritage of common experiences which were enough to cooperate between them in the New World and to build new customs and new practices reflecting their African past. Most certainly, at least, two process of acculturation were going on at the same time. First of all, the regrouping of Africans of different origins provoked a phenomenon of interaction of different cultures. New customs and habits were created but they were still profoundly rooted in the African cultural heritage of the enslaved Africans. This kind of cultural rebirth was verified when a great number of Africans were put together in the same place, for example, on the Sea Islands where it was possible for slaves to preserve certain religious practices and even certain linguistic models. Secondly, there is no doubt that the meeting of African and western cultures deeply modified the process of the two cultures in the history of the United States. One must not forget that the western institutions did not have the same solidity throughout the New World and that in areas where there were fewer westerners than Africans, African culture had more chance to be strengthened. In the conflict which followed the coming of African slaves in the New World, the acculturation process took different forms according to circumstances and areas.

Sometimes, it was purely and simply blocked when the Africans had adopted enough adequate knowledge of their common cultural heritage to be able to appropriate western culture and to reinterpret it nearly entirely according to their own African experience. For example, in places like Brazil and the Caribbean Islands like in Jamaica, the success of several slave revolts permitted the transplantation of a great part of African cultural life style. In North America, the process went on in a progressive and normal way, but it left some survivals, somehow weak, of African culture because of the predominance of westerner culture. Meanwhile when it comes to measure or evaluate the persistence of African culture in the New World and mainly in the United States of America, the matter becomes more complex. In the linguistic level, it is visible in the use of some words such as yam, goober, canoe or banjo. Like the ancestors of most contemporary Americans who immigrated to the New World, Africans brought with them their cultural traditions. For example language, art, music, religious beliefs, cooking and diet. In oral and written literature, African culture appears in popular tales which American writers, lullabies, poems and songs of various forms which researchers have gathered recently. In the religious domain, divination, voodoo and certain secular practices originated from Africa. Finally, we also notice traces of African culture in work songs, games, community life and different artistic manifestations. The fact that African culture has survived in various degrees in America, doesn't mean that African Americans have been imperfectly adapted to the New World. This is a symbol of slave resistance and the survival of African heritage. It can be taken as an indication that the culture which they inherited from Africa was well organized and strong enough to survive in certain customs and traditions in an alien environment.

Taking into account all these aspects, it would not be wrong to state that in the conflict of different cultures, only cultural practices of superior valor will have the strength and tenacity to survive. That was the case of slaves' transplanted culture. African survivals in the United States of America also come from the great plasticity of African institutions. In fact, the relations between African tribes and between African Kingdoms had been sufficiently diversified and strong enough to teach Africans how to adopt quantities of practices and customs taken from other people with whom they were in contact while still keeping a great part of their anterior way of life.

CHAPTER 2

THE SPIRITUALS, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE

For English speakers the term music means the art and science of combining vocal and/or instrumental sounds or tones so as to form a wide variety of structural, aesthetically, and emotionally satisfying expressions of a culture's underlying belief system.²⁷ Under such a definition, music generally includes all types of written or/and aural aesthetic expression, regardless of their function or the context of their performance. Therefore, apart from the aesthetic aspect, black music is generally loaded with functions depending on the context. In America, Black music has help African Americans document through their history in an alien land and under oppression. As Miles Mike Fisher said, spirituals have served the enslaved African to describe his world:

A member of the younger generation of Negroes indicated in 1939 that he was discussing the historical materials of spirituals when he wrote that the slaves "took a good look at this world and told what he saw." His "true interpretation" of spirituals held that they were evidences of the Negroes' obsession with freedom and justice and that they included plans of strategy by which these could be achieved. After such a suggestive beginning the writer proceeded to interpret the allegory by dubbing anyone who mistreated a slave as Satan."²⁸

For this reason, some other definitions can be suitable as African American music is intrinsically rooted in the history of Africans' experience in America. This following section deals with the meanings of the Negro spirituals during the enslavement of Africans and the about the way they saw the world in bondage.

²⁷ Lois Ibn al Faruq. 1995. *Music, Musicians and Muslim Law*. Vol. 17, n. 1, Texas: University of Texas press. P. 6

²⁸ Miles M. Fisher. Opcit. P. 25.

1. Black Spirituals in the Slave System

We cannot deal with African-American music and culture without talking about the realities in the south of the United States of America. The South is seen as a symbol of homeland in the history of the African Americans. It is the starting point of this history. The mentality of the South was greatly influenced by conservatism as developed by Edmund Burke of England and John Randolph of Roanoke. Their ideas had profoundly backed the southerners' rebellious mind. Many people imagine the South as another land different from the rest of the United States of America. Meanwhile some other people would say that the South is only a geographical division of the United States of America with some particularities and among these the presence of a large body of Africans. This presence makes it a different entity because it shapes a history of the South as a unique one. The South can also be understood as different states with a common goal that is to institutionalize slavery with its set of brutalities. Brutalities would take another form in the post-emancipation era with the implementation of Jim Crow laws marked by racism. This period in the history of the African Americans can be illustrated by Flates Brown, in *The Blues of Flates Brown*, who wrote a satirical song about Grubbs called "Gritty Grubbs Blues" which can be taken as a follow-up song to the actual satirical song "Raise a Ruckus Tonight" that was popular at that moment:

My ol' missus promise me

When she die she set me free.

Lived so long her haid got ball

Give up the notion of dying at all.²⁹

We cannot trace a definite limitation of mentality and social behavior in the South because there was:

A complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and associations of ideas, which, if it is not common to every group of white people in the South, is still current in appreciable measure or another, and in some part or another, to all norms relatively negligible ones.³⁰

This variety in mental and social norms does not make great difference between the South and the other parts of the country and the nation is still one even though there are some disparities. But the dominant trait in the mind of the South was individualism. Such an attitude was personal and self-asserting. It is a gentleman's mind which was deeply anchored in agricultural life and which had its origins in British conservatism. Alan Lomax asserted:

Every county in the South is a small empire, with its own autonomous power. This county system of government has the virtue of allowing a small area, a small parcel of votes, the opportunity to shape a local lifestyle, independent of the state and nation pattern, so often controlled by party politics.³¹

²⁹ Carmen Kynard. 2008. "The Blues Playingest Dog You Ever Heard Of": (Re)positioning Literacy Through African American Blues Rhetoric. *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4. p. 362

³⁰ W. J. Cash. *The Mind of the South*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, MCMLXX. P. VIII.

³¹ Alan Lomax. 2002. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York: The New Press. P. 20.

Lomax added that every county had its own laws and could decide about how to deal with their enslaved African's without having other counties to interfere. This attitude came from a British conservative heritage greatly influence by the philosophy of Edmund Burk. According to Edmund Burke, conservatism is not a fixed body of dogma. It is a talent for re-expressing one's convictions to fit the time. Southerners espoused this political ideology because it fitted their time and realities. "Conservatives are dubious of wholesale alteration and they think society is a spiritual reality that possesses an eternal life and a delicate constitution. Therefore, it cannot be scrapped and recast as if it were a machine."³² Any change must come from the will of God but not from the action of man. The only equality in which conservatives believe in is the judgment of God and equality before the court of laws. Equality in conditions is not imaginable. Conservatives are also persuaded that freedom and property are closely linked. If you separate property from private possession, Leviathan becomes master of all. Southern conservatism was incarnated by John Randolph. The conservative policy was rooted in four impulses:

- A half-indolent distaste for alteration, a determination to preserve an agricultural society;
- A love for local rights, and sensitivity about the Negro question. It originated as far as the signers of the constitution. In the early years, the Negro issue was really a problem and by 1806, it created a dilemma in the national politics.
- Randolph was antagonist to Thomas Jefferson, mostly in the interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. Randolph states that men are not born equal and this is visible in their physical, moral, and intellectual differences. For him, Jefferson leveling doctrines mean anarchy. Illusion of direct democracy leads to direct tyranny.

³² Riley Kirk. *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Randolph*. Sixth Revised Edition. p. 59.

- The act of voting is exclusively reserved to those who have property because property and power go together. This deliberate position helped Randolph to rally to his political side all slave-holders. Southern conservatism with Randolph is reluctant to radical change. The existing order had to prevail. Total democracy means destruction of the society. Randolph political teaching gave slave-holders freehand to use terror on the slaves. The use of coercive method by the enslavers was determinant. Without the power to punish which the state conferred upon the master, bondage could not have existed. Confronted to such a life of horror, oppression and subjugation the slaves had two alternatives: they had to choose between remarkable realism and adapted to necessity or found strategies to escape to the North. They created songs to pass messages to volunteers about how to escape and which way to follow. Those were coded messages which were very famous under the Underground Railroad songs. Among them we have “*Follow the Drinking Gourd*” and “*Wade in the Water.*” Later with the disillusionment of emancipation, songs were created or adapted to back the Great Migration to the North and to celebrate freedom. But little changes happened in the way black people were treated in the North, white people can oppress them in the North just as they do in the South on the one hand, and on the other racist employment practices in the North limit their opportunities as it is evident in this lyric about life in New York:

I got the New York City Blues, far from down home blues,

(I said) I got the New York City, far from home blues

Ain't in no union, but I sure done paid my dues.³³

³³ Levine. Op. Cit. P. 362

This song conveys a message of disillusionment in the North. The northern Promised Land doesn't keep all its promises. The author protests because even if he does experience freedom, white oppression is still lingering in the north and racist employment practices limits his opportunities.

2. Black Music and Community Consciousness

As far as African-Americans' history is concerned, music can be taken as sad thoughts, sorrow experiences sung or dances out. Therefore, it bears several meanings which are understood by those who have undergone the same experience. Different cultures surely share some practices because of cross-cultural interactions. But this being said every culture has its distinctive markers. These specific features make a people's culture's identity. Music is one of these markers for African Americans. Their music in its conception, manifestation, social and historical origins, and in its performance is an aspect that shows how the ties that bound African-Americans to their African origins are strong. They have tried to prove that the race question doesn't exist separate and distinct from the relentless search for a better integration in the American society. Their commitment to uplifting the black race is intrinsically linked to the attempt to improve their social, cultural, moral and material conditions. Particularly some African-Americans use the musical form to address some of the most compelling socio-political issues: the question of identity and black consciousness. Levine states that:

African-American religious music seemed far superior because slaves used it to articulate many of their deepest and more enduring feelings and certainties...it was in the spirituals that slaves found a medium which resembled in many crucial ways the cosmology they had brought with them from Africa and afforded them the possibility of both adapting to and transcending their situation.³⁴

Songs like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*; *Jimmy Crack Corn*; *Frankie and Johnny*; *String of pearl*, and *Sinner Please*, are very important in the expression of black consciousness.

Sinner, please don't let this harvest pass;

Sinner, please don't let this harvest pass, harvest pass,

Sinner, please, don't let this harvest pass,

And die and lose your soul at last.³⁵

This song which referred to escape at a precise time of the year is very significant of the mindset of the bonded Africans. None of these songs would be here today without the influence from African American culture. To understand and fully appreciate the music they enjoy today, young African-Americans must first understand that while slave songs were a prominent part of pre-Civil War culture, they also had great influence on modern culture because the history of African Americans as excluded minorities who fought hard for freedom and try to keep going in modern time is embedded in these songs. In order to further understand their identity, African-Americans of the new generation, must first know a certain amount of information about the political and historical content of African music in the process of enslavement. Music was and still is a very important part of African culture. Most of African music was used as a way to document history.

³⁴ Levine. Opcit. P.

³⁵ Miles M. Fisher. opcit. P. 27

It can help African-Americans to be aware of their self, and to know about the importance of having one's own identity in a diverse culture, hence the importance to learn about their past through music.

3. The Spirituals in the African American Experience

As mentioned earlier, spirituals were mostly sacred songs. But there was not any distinction between sacred and secular in the world of black slaves as it is known in western culture neither. We have already said that for the Africans the sacred world of divinities and the other sectors of life are interrelated, they form a harmonious universe. For the same type of relationship the spirituals were transformed into the blues. James Cone said:

During slavery the social movement of black people was limited and the church served as the primary social unit for black expression. After the Civil War, the social mobility of blacks increased, and the church became only one of several places where blacks could meet and talk about their problems of black existence. Other "priests" of the community began to emerge alongside of the preachers and deacons; and other songs were sung in addition to the spirituals. The "new priests" of the black community were the blues men and women; and their songs were the blues. Like the preachers in the church, they proclaimed the Word of black existence, depicting its joy and sorrow, love and hate, and the awesome burden of being "free" in a racist society when one is black.³⁶

The way spirituals were used is illustrated in the following statement. In fact, they were not sung solely or even primarily in churches or praise houses, but were used as rowing songs, field songs, work songs and also social songs.

³⁶ James Cone. *opcit.* p. 102.

The Devil's mad and I'm glad,
He lost the soul he thought he had.
Ole Satan toss a ball at me.
O me no weary yet...
Him think the ball would hit my soul.
O me no weary yet...
The ball for hell and I for heaven
O me no weary yet.³⁷

Here the master is pictured as the devil over whom the slaves triumph. Even if they bear a certain sense of sadness, slave songs were most of the time loaded with a feeling of confidence. They were confident that contemporary power relationships were not immutable and that would turn to their favor. They believed in instantaneous change and in the reward of persistence and that nothing could stand in the way of the justice they would receive: "Did not old Pharaoh get lost, get lost, get lost... get lost in the Red Sea?" "Jesus make de dumb to speak... Jesus make the cripple walk." "Keep a' inching along like a poor inchworm, / Jesus will come by'n bye."³⁸ These are just example to justify that spirituals were not all destined to praise God. They were in diverse context of enslaved African life. Like the song that portrayed the master as a devil, satirized music was very common in Africa. Tracing this practice to its African origin, we quote:

All is well to-day.

³⁷ Lawrence W. Levine. *Ibid.* p. 40.

³⁸ Levine. *Lococit.* P. 40.

We know that a Brong man eats rats,
But we never knew that one of royal blood eats rats.
But to-day we have seen our master, Ansah, eating rats.
To-day all is well and we may say so, say so, say so.
At other times we may not say so, say so, say so.³⁹

During slavery, in the South, black slave did likewise. They used satire to ridicule their masters in coded messages to escape punishment. Given the importance of research which treats of African-American slaves' resistance to servitude and which also studies the musical contribution of black slaves to American civilization, one can wonder why little attention is shown toward satirized songs. Yet, they were the way by which slaves used to rail the defaults of their white masters, whence the first forms of revolts even though they were pacific ones. According to William D. Piersen, "only a small part of African-American satirized expression was used against the leading white class; meanwhile, this aggressive use of the ridicule against the white power is one of the most interesting examples of the survival of African cultural institutions in the New World."⁴⁰ This satirized derision served to exteriorize boiling frustrations of the repressed and exploited African-American culture. This is illustrated by this quote:

Missus and mosses a-walkin de street,
Deir hands in deir pockets and nothin' to eat.
She'd better be home a-washin' up de dishes,

³⁹ Levine. Lococit.

⁴⁰ Daniel J. Crowley. 1988. *Folklore Africain en Amérique*. Paris : Editions Caribéennes. p. 23.

An' a-cleanin up de ole man's raggitty britches.⁴¹

There is also abundant evidence that secular songs could be used to celebrate Christmas in an Africanized manner or to sing out social behavior in the slave community itself. Sometimes slaves would sing to criticize mean masters, to curse their wicked dying masters or to mourn over broken promises. There is no doubt that slaves may have used their songs as a means of secret communication. But it happened that a traitor sold out a plot to escape to the overseer. And an ex-slave said that when one of their fellow slaves was suspected betrayal, they would sing lines like the following while working in the field:

O Judyas he wuz a' ceiful man

He went an' betray a mos' innocen' man.

Fo' thirty pieces a silver dat it wuz done

He went in de woods an' 'e self he hung.⁴²

Social songs as they appeared in all events marking the life of African-Americans' experience through freedom, showed that Black secular music was not the resultant of slavery but the manifestation of a culture which takes into account a past, live a present and plan a future. The new form it has adopted through time remarkably justifies its oral character and its liability to change according to circumstances. In the working fields in Africa, activities used to be backed by drums, clapping, and singing.

⁴¹ Sterling Brown. 1953. Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Secular Ballads and Work Songs. *Phylon*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Atlanta (Clark Atlanta university), p. 52

⁴² Levine. Opcit. P. 52.

But once on the plantations, slave owners forbade the use of African languages and secular ways of celebrating work. So slaves had to adapt their new working songs. Drums were replaced by humming and the dancing and clapping by the rhythm of their instrument. This is to say that music is an integral part of black communities and culture, even when they are contrasted to neighboring racial and ethnic groups. The mood of the workers would change according to the relations they had with their master. If the latter was pleasant and conciliatory, he would receive praises and slaves would produce more work. But if he was wicked or mean, slaves were less willing to work and they would ridicule him in coded songs. As Bacon says, slaves would sing over and over and laughed uproariously, using such lines as:

That ole black gal
Pissed in the coffee, buddy,
Pissed in the tea, boy.
If I hadn't been a hustler, she'd uv pissed on me, buddy,
She'd pissed on me.⁴³

But work songs can also be a way of expressing happiness in doing a certain activity that is just to mean fun:

Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,
Fire can't warm you, be so cold.⁴⁴

⁴³ Levine. *Ibid.* p. 212.

For African Americans as well as for their forebears in Africa, music was and still is a participant activity rather than a performance phenomenon. It is a cultural expression.

4. Transition: From Negro Spirituals to the Blues

As aforementioned, slave music regardless of its origins, was a distinctive cultural form, and that it was created and adapted through communal process. This was essential in the use of the songs to express slave consciousness. These songs said a good deal about the nature and quality of slave life and personality. Slave songs and the kind of culture that was born from them show that slavery was never so complete a system of physical and mental assault that it prevented the slaves from building out independent cultural forms. It never pervaded all their mind and culture and slaves were able to develop an independent art form and a distinctive voice. Physically dominated, enslaved Africans created a psychological space by projecting their fate in the future that the slave system holders could not reach. They bound up their identity with the future judgment of God at this moment their liberation became a full reality. James Cone said:

In view of the emphasis of black eschatology on the certainty of divine liberation of the oppressed from earthly bondage, I contend that it provides the best theological foundations for a truly radical interpretation of the future. Recently there has been much discussion among American and European theologians about humanizing the world according to God's promised future. But the future about which they speak is too abstract and too unrelated to the history and culture of black people who have been and are being dehumanized by white imperialists and colonialists.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Levine. *Ibid.* p. 313.

⁴⁵ James Cone. *Opcit.* 96.

This questions the theories that conceived of slavery as a close system which destroyed the vitality of the slaves and left them dependent human beings. The attempt of slaveholders to suppress African linguistic and institutional life had failed. Music has helped slaves to be collectively aware of their culture and to resist total acculturation. But what made the strength and uniqueness of African American music in America was its oral form and its liability to change and adapt to circumstances and to time. Slave songs were never static; and at no time did enslaved Africans create a final version of a spiritual for example. We quote:

Slave songs present us with abundant evidence that in the structure of their music and dance, in the uses to which music was put, in the survival of the oral tradition, in the retention of such practices as spirit possession which often accompanied the creation of spirituals, and in the ways in which the slaves expressed their new religion, important elements of their shared African heritage remained alive not just as quaint cultural vestiges but as vitally creative elements of slave culture. This could never have happened if slavery had so completely closed in around the slave, so totally penetrated his personality structure as to reduce him to a kind of 'tabula rasa' upon which the white man could write what he chose.⁴⁶

Therefore, Africans came with their spirituals and always felt free to alter and recreate them. So their imagery and time richness made the spirituals the most impressive religious songs in American culture. They were born from Africa and transformed with the conversion of black slaves to Christianity. As it had been with secular religion, slaves were forbidden to worship freely. Elizabeth Rose testified that although she and her fellow slaves on a plantation were Catholics, their white owners did not allow them to celebrate Mass, pray or read the Holy Scripts. She said:

⁴⁶ Levine. *Ibid.* p. 53.

We used to hide behind bricks and hold church ourselves. You see, the Catholics preachers from France wouldn't let us shout, and the Lawd done said you gotta shout if you want to be saved. That's in the Bible.

Sometimes we held church all night long, til' way in the mornin'. We burned some grease in the can for the preacher to see the Bible...⁴⁷

The religious music of the slave is pervaded by a sense of change, transcendence, justice, and personal worth. The spirituals have been referred to as sorrow songs and in some respect they were:

This world is not my home.

This world is not my home.

This world's a howling wilderness,

This world is not my home.⁴⁸

The role of the spirituals in African American history is multifaceted. Sometimes, slaves associated Heaven with blacks in their ordeal and Hell with their masters whom they pictured as evil-doers. It means that slaves despite the restrictions which were put upon them knew enough of the orthodox theology of the time to consign all bad slave-holders to Hell. Frederick Douglass went further by stating that some slaves asserted that no white people went to Heaven. The fugitive slave Charles Ball strongly defended that his fellow slaves refused to picture Heaven as a place where whites and blacks live in perfect equality and boundless affection. Spirituals in their main part must be seen as sustaining protest implicitly or explicitly.

⁴⁷ Levine. Ibid. p. 41.

⁴⁸ Levine. Ibid. P.32.

Charles Ball continued that the idea of revolution in the condition of the whites and the blacks is the corner-stone of the religion of the latter. He said that Heaven would be no heaven to him [the slave], if he was not to be avenged of his enemies. Another important point to understand spirituals is the identity the African Americans conferred to the Christ. In fact, there has always been a controversy over the blackness or whiteness of Jesus. The God the slaves sang of was neither remote nor abstract, but it was intimate, personal, and immediate as the gods of Africa have been. “O when I talk, I talk wid God,” Mass Jesus is my bosom friend,” “I’m goin’ to walk with [talk with, live with, see] King Jesus by myself, by myself.”⁴⁹ The enslaved Africans established this closed communication with God to whom they probably identified themselves. There was no way that they thought about a white people’s God to liberate them. Religion has always been culture-based. Because of their experience in America, black people have always considered themselves as a different entity. They did not see themselves living with white people even in Heaven after death. This attitude of considering themselves as a nation within another nation has been reflected in slaves’ several attempts to escape and in freedmen’s going north or to Africa, anywhere far from the scene of slavery. James Cone contended:

The Negro could ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man’s culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, sub-cultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man’s land that provided the logic and beauty of his music.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Levine. *Ibid.* p. 35.

⁵⁰ James Cone. *Opcit.* P. 102

The Blues will help express this loneliness, this situation of lost and abandonment that affected the African Americans after the Civil War and the Emancipation proclamation.

CHAPTER 3

THE BLUES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICANS' EXPERIENCE

Blues is a music genre based on the use of the blue chord progression and the notes. Though several forms exist, the 12th-bar blues chord progression are the most frequently encountered. For expressive purpose, blue notes are sung or played at a slightly lower pitch than that of the major scale. Blues emerged at the end of the 19th century as an accessible form of self-expression in African American community of the United States of America from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymes simple narrative ballads. The use of blue notes and the prominence of call-and-response patterns in the music and lyrics are indicative of African influence. James Cone defining the Blues says:

What is the precise meaning of the blues? And how is that meaning related to the experience of the black community? These questions are not easy to answer because the blues do not deal with abstract ideas that can be analyzed from the perspective of "objective reason." They are not propositional truths about the black experience.⁵¹

The term of "the blues" refers to "the blue devil", meaning melancholy and sadness; an early use of the term in this sense is found in Georges Colman's one act farce 'Blue Devil' (1798). Though the use of the phrase in African American music may be older, it has been attested to since 1912, when Hart Wand's "Dallas Blues" became the first copyrighted Blues composition.

⁵¹ James Cone. *Ibit*. P. 42.

In lyrics the phrase is often used to describe a depressed mood. But historically, slavery was the context that gave birth to the blues as it did to other genres of enslaved Africans' music.

1. The Blues as Secular Songs

The same they did for Negro-spirituals, slave work songs greatly influenced modern blues; examples included the songs sung by workers such as stevedores and roustabouts, and the field hollers of slaves. Slave music, be it work songs, social songs, or spirituals, helped slaves to fight oppression during slavery time and to long for their freedom. Their music constituted a collective state of mind and conveyed a community's needs to get rid of oppression and subjugation, but also to reject a religious that had contributed to their subjugation. But after the civil war and the Emancipation Proclamation, that freed slaves, African Americans were confronted with segregation and discrimination laws known as Jim Crow laws. Many former slaves were forced to migrate to the North for a quest for better living conditions. But once there, even if they enjoyed tokens of liberty, former slaves were deeply disillusioned as they faced new forms of racism and horrible working conditions. Their voting had been taken from them so they could no longer defend themselves.

After disfranchisement, the Negroes had no way to defend themselves when white mobs rioted against them. Without the vote, Negroes could not elect officials who would uphold their rights and prevent the spread of Jim Crow. The white had taken away the Negro's vote, yet the Negro was not left alone.

Instead, some of the worst riots broke out after the Negro was no longer a “threat” as a voter.⁵²

They had each to take care of their own destiny, individualism being the main character of American culture. For this reason, they were few characteristics that were common to all blues, as the genre takes its shapes from the particularities of each individual performer. However, some characteristics that are common to most of African American music were present before the creation of the modern Blues. The earliest Blues-like music was performed in a call-and-response style played without accompaniment or harmony and it had a functional expression. This first form of Blues music was an adaptation of the field shouts and hollers performed by slaves on plantations and that were expanded into simple solo songs that bore emotional content. It means that individual voices existed in African American music before the rise of the blues. In both spirituals and work songs, songs leaders were important, but they were invariably answered by the group. The songs were sung in communal situations. Other chief forms of solo music were lullabies and field hollers. Lullabies were sung for babies and children too young and innocent to respond. Field hollers stood in special and physical isolation. This confirms that blues were not the first personalized music African Americans had developed. But it stands out as the first kind of music in the history of the United States of America to lack the kind of antiphony that had marked other Black music forms. The call-and-respond form was maintained, but it was the singer who responded to himself in the Blues. And this was done either verbally or by instrumental accompaniment.

⁵² Carol F. Drisko and Edgar A. Toppin. 1967. *The Unfinished March*. New York: Zenith Books Editions. P. 73.

The Blues can be said to be the most typically American music African Americans had created with a major degree of acculturation. It was deeply influenced by the individualistic character of the larger part of the society. This individualism was something alien to black slaves brought from Africa. The Blues were solo music in performance and in content. In the post-bellum era, Blues music became a dominant musical form among African Americans throughout the country. It expressed the consciousness, the attitude and experiences of large numbers of Negroes in America. Comparing the Blues and the Spirituals Carole Drisko and Edgar Toppin said:

Another type of music that the former slaves sang to express their feelings about their lives was the blues. Spirituals and work songs were sung by the groups, but the blues were sung solo. A blues singer “talked” about poverty, loneliness, wandering, love troubles, losing a job, homesickness, sadness, and brushes with the police. Along with the work songs and the spirituals, the blues told of the Negroes’ troubles during nearly three hundred years of slavery and the long road that followed.⁵³

The same themes documented in the Spirituals and the work songs appeared in the Blues. But contrary to the two first types of songs, for the Blues, the personal identity of the individual performer utterly dominated the song which revolved around the singer’s own feelings, experiences, fears, dreams, acquaintances, and so on. This can be illustrated by Charley Patton’s Green River Blues:

Some people say the Green River Blues ain’t bad.
Some people say the Green River Blues ain’t bad.
Then it must not have been the Green River Blues I had.
It was late one night, everything was still.

⁵³ Carole F. Driskop and Edgar A. Toppin. Ibid. p. 43.

It was late one night, Baby, everything was still.

I could see my baby upon a lonesome hill.

How long, every train been gone?

How long, baby that evening been gone?

Yes, I'm worried now but I won't be worried long.⁵⁴

In Walter Dean Myers's "The Blues of Flats Brown", Flats the main trickster, is also the quintessential blues performer who experiences the pain of brutality, maintain his humanity and transcends his experiences with a comic lyricism. Through flats, the main protagonist's blues, there is an awareness of experienced pain, and an ability to confront and move past dirty, lowdown meanness of represented by Grubbs who incarnates the symbol of white oppression. The blues singer with his songs, his language and lyrics, with moaning solo guitar castigates his own oppression, that of his people and the system which puts them, particularly which puts him in such a situation. The weight of oppression and subjugation seems to follow him and his race through time and space. The Blues becomes an African American identity, language, literary imagination, and a call to fight and live up to the ideal and promises of freedom and equality for all. But this freedom seemed to be an illusion after the ratification of the 13th Amendment that marked the freeing of all the slaves. Over the course of the nineteenth century, a part from Jim Crow laws, white Americans and mainly in the South evoked the imagined "new Negro crime" of raping white women in order to legitimize violence upon African Americans;

⁵⁴ Levine. Ibid. P. 223.

white lynch mobs called forth an image of the black male rapist to justify the torture and mutilation of black men”⁵⁵ as they used to do during slavery time. Southern brutalities on exposed and unprotected African Americans had created many themes for Blues singers. Some of those themes we assume to be the most used by authors will be dealt with in the following sections.

2. The Blues and Migration

For African Americans, 1865 seemed to be full of promise for people who had been enslaved for over two centuries. They were set free by the 13th Amendment. Abraham Lincoln began to design his plan for Reconstruction as early as 1863. Even though he declared secession unconstitutional and that he denied the right of any state to leave the Union, Lincoln was looking for a way to restore the old relationship between the North and the South as quickly as possible. Black people in general, freedmen and slaves had taken an important role in the Civil War and should benefit from Reconstruction. A long war had been fought to keep the Union and the victory of the Union freed the enslaved Africans. In four years of a Civil War, 638,000 men, North and South, had died, and many freedmen fought bravely in the Civil War; 38,000 of them had died in the fighting.⁵⁶ But the freedmen were disillusioned as they were set free, empty handed, without land, without money to buy any landed property, without shelter and without the protection of the law. Frederick Douglass contended: “The freedmen “were sent away empty handed, without money, without friends, without a foot of land to stand upon.

⁵⁵ Shawn Michelle Smith. 2000. “Looking at One’s Self Through the eyes of Others”: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition. *African American Review*, Vol. 34, N. 4, p. 583

⁵⁶ Carol F. Drisko and Edgar A. Toppin. Opcit. P. 1.

Old and young, sick and well, they were turned loose to the open sky... to their enemies.”⁵⁷ Another author has given her point of view on the unfulfilled and vanished dreams of the freedmen. Ira Berlin said:

Having celebrated the freedom that accompanied wartime emancipation and the enfranchisement of Radical Reconstruction, black Southerners had seen their revolution run backward. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, rights were lost, freedoms shriveled, and opportunities dwindled. Ex-Confederates and their sympathizers—styling themselves “Redeemers”—regained their place atop Southern society, stripping black people of the suffrage and locking them in a position of economic dependency and social inferiority.⁵⁸

The Bluesmen and women had sung about this disillusionment and situation of abandonment. Because of the violence they were confronted with, they started a long journey North with was reflected in their songs. Isabel Wilkerson who spent more than ten years investigating about what happened to the families of black people who left the South for the north, dealt at the same time with the music that was born in urban setting talking about these people and their history. She posited:

So, too, rose the language and music of urban America that sprang from the blues that came with the migrants and dominates our airwaves to this day. So, too, came the people who might not have existed, or become who they did, had there been no Great Migration. People as diverse as James Baldwin and Michele Obama, Miles Davis and Toni Morrison, Spike Lee and Denzel Washington, and anonymous teachers, store clerks, steelworkers, and physicians, were all products of the Great Migration. They were all children whose life chances were altered because a parent or grandparent had made the hard decision to leave.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Carole F. Drisko et al. Ibid. p. 4.

⁵⁸ Ira Berlin. 2010. *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*. New York: Penguin Books. P. 152.

⁵⁹ Isabel Wilkerson. 2011. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Vintage Books Editions. P. 10.

Amiri Baraka tells us of how the newly arrived migrants made their way through the sophistication of urban life and how they made new songs about these changings:

My home's in Texas, what am I doin' up here?

My home's in Texas, what am I doin' up here?

Yes, my good corn whisky, baby, and women brought me here.⁶⁰

Whatever theme is dealt with the blues always sing about something wrong or something happening even though African Americans did not have the physical power to change it. In that sense black music moved from the otherworldly reality it was conferred by many writers to the reality of Black existence.

3. The Blues and Black existence

The Blues reflect the mood of the black man in every situation: love, poverty, hate, treason, racism, and many other situations. The Blues follow the black people in their ordeals. James Cone said the truth is that “no Black person can escape the Blues, because the Blues are an inherent part of Black existence in America. To be black is to be blue.”⁶¹

The truth of Black existence is expressed in the following lyrics:

If de blues was whisky,

I'd stay drunk all de time

If de blues was money

I'd be a millionaire.⁶²

⁶⁰ Amiri Baraka. Opcit. P. 107.

⁶¹ James Cone. Opcit. P. 103.

⁶² James Cone. Lococit. P. 103.

The Blues haunted the Black man like a disease because they reflect a life of harshness in America.

De blues ain't nothin'

But a poor man's heart disease.⁶³

As we have said it earlier, African American music took a new turn after the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Having gained his freedom, and with the end of the southern plantation system, the Black man still found himself trapped in the slaving situation he had been during slavery. Sharecropping and the Black Belt is the historical setting where the Blues took birth. The setting was the exploitation of Black people and their frustration and disillusionment. Sharecropping, tenants, convict lease systems were new forms of slavery. Drisko and Toppin said:

After the Civil War, the freedmen did not receive the “forty acres and a mule” they hoped for. With this, they would have become landowners and independent farmers. Instead, most old Confederate plantations were returned to their former owners. The freedmen found themselves drifting into a new form of slavery. it was called the *sharecropping system*, and it has lasted the present day in some parts of the country.⁶⁴

Du Bois said that it was not wholly the Black man's fault if he was trapped in the sharecropping system because the Negro farmer started behind; in fact he started in debt. This was not his choosing, but the crime of this happy-go-luck nation that went blundering along with its Reconstruction tragedies.

⁶³ James Cone. *Lococit.* P. 103.

⁶⁴ Carole F. drisko and Edgar A. Toppin. *Opcit.* P. 35.

Once in debt, it was no easy matter for a whole Negro race to emerge.⁶⁵ Marvin V. Curtis posited that the Black man turning to sharecropping meant still dealing with the “master” on a different level. He was provided with inadequate housing and food. When he became free, he had to provide himself with those essentials by turning a portion of his crop to the owner for rent. Without the whip and the lash, the former slave was still mistreated as a person. He had new difficulties coping with the situation in terms of making money, supporting a family and oneself. Black music took a new form during this period of Reconstruction.⁶⁶ But the former slave still enjoyed his freedom and sang about it mixing themes of freedom and romance:

I don't want you to be no slave,

I don't you to work all day,

I don't want you to be true,

I just want to make love to you.⁶⁷

But the Blues brought new meaning in the life of the black man. The lyrics of the spirituals were focused on expression of intense faith and hope and the liberation of Black people by God's judgment. “Deep River,” “Way Over in Beulah Land,” and others reflect those ideas. “We were oppressed people, so we had to psyche ourselves out to believe in something, so it was usually the hope of a song, the lyric that meant that's all right, tomorrow's going to be a little better than today.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ William E. B. Du Bois. Opcit. P. 110.

⁶⁶ Marvin V. Curtis. 1988. “How to Survive in Your Native Land: A Look at the History of African American Music in America”. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2. P. 104.

⁶⁷ Amiri Baraka. Opcit. P. 67.

⁶⁸ Marvin V. Curtis. Opcit. 104.

But the Blues contradicted the otherworldly orientation of the spirituals. They dealt with topics that were primarily supposed to be taboo such as relationships about sexes. The term of the “Devil music” apparently came from the fact that while the spirituals were the music of the faithful, the blues became the music of the faithless.⁶⁹ Angela Davis said that the vast majority of Ma Rainey’s Blues revolved around problems emanating from personal relationships. Even though they talked about their sexual love, former slaves’ life and preoccupations were objectively limited by the rules and circumstances imposed by the economic conditions of sharecropping and tenant farming. Meanwhile, they still established love relationships that would provide them with fulfillment and sang about them.⁷⁰ Angela Davis added that Ma Rainey’s blues metaphorically expressed a range of economic, social, and psychological difficulties which Black people suffered during the post-Civil War era. There was no distinction between the desire to find a good man and the desperate desire to create a new life free of poverty, discrimination, and all the other material causes of the Blues. Here is an example where are mixed up the themes of abandonment and hard economic conditions:

Yes I’m mad, my heart’s sad,
The man I loved treated me so bad;
He brought me out of my home town.
Took me to New York and threw me down
Without a cent to pay my rent,
I’m left alone, without a home;

⁶⁹ Marvin V. Curtis. *Ibid.* 105.

⁷⁰ Angela Y. Davis. 1990. *Black Woman and Music: A Historical Legacy of Struggle*. Pp. 13-14.

I told him I would leave him and my time ain't long.

My folks done sent the money, and I'm Dixie bound.⁷¹

During Reconstruction in post-Civil War era, the Blues became an African American identity, language, literary imagination, and a call to fight and live up to the ideal and promises of freedom and equality for all. But this freedom seemed to be an illusion after the 13th Amendment that marked the freeing of slaves. Using music as the main source and means of expression, African Americans voiced the reality of their life and the contradictions of the American society.

⁷¹ Angela Davis. *Ibid.* p. 16.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING BLACKNESS THROUGH MUSIC

Culture is what binds together people living and sharing the same realities, referring to the same past and making perspectives for a common goal. For African-Americans, oral language and mainly music has been an important way for cultural expression. Being denied any formal education, the only way by which they could transmit their heritage was through oral communication. As we have seen it in the first chapter, some scholars have always castigated the fact that oral traditions can be used as a vehicle of an African civilization. The reason why such allegations are developed is that African-Americans were brutally cut from their culture and that there was no civilization in Africa. But this politics used by the white men was a way to make their slave and later African Americans have a feeling of baseness and emptiness in order to be obedient and exploited.

1. Centering the Politics of Black Education in America

Whatever techniques, modes, or tactics were employed, going from Thurgood Marshall's legal fight in the court room, Malcolm X's liberation movement, Dr. King's moralism and reliance to nonviolence civil disobedience and direct action, to Huey Newton's advocacy for armed self-defense, Judge Leon Higginbotham's and Charles Blockson's saga for the revival of black history, or Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentric Theory, they are, all, in their specific time period, African American-centering methodologies employed by committed black people, radicals or integrationists who have striven to eradicate racism, unequal opportunities, and the situation of exclusion African Americans have been victims of for centuries. With the rising of the white people's determination to create and reinforce separate but not equal laws in America that have been readapted in time and space, an African American response to self-determination and cultural autonomy rises in all sectors of life. Songs which support the status quo do not qualify as protest songs because they go against the ideals of freedom and liberation. And some ways, musicians, whether they are black gospel singers, blues singers, jazz men or women, and hip hoppers have always been involved in the struggle for black liberation. My viewpoint is that understanding the history of African-American music can help legitimize more African oral traditions and contribute to the creation of more scholarship for African-based culture and history studies. But enslaved Africans' oral background has greatly helped African-Americans to undergo cultural survival of their past. Talking about Booker T. Washington striving to achieved personal education, Elliot Wright says: "Life is a series of problems to be faced and mastered in a practical manner.

When his lack of formal book learning worried him, he turned to other sources”.⁷²

Those other sources African-Americans referred to were their oral African past.

W. E. B. Du Bois states that one of the most pressing problems confronting persons of African origin and descent and humanity as a whole is “the problem of education.” This education should at least involve essentially three things: first a critical knowledge of the past, critical study of African history; second, question of culture, cultural study and cultural inquiry; and last, an understanding of present and future vital needs of not only continental and diasporan Africans but also of humanity as a whole.⁷³ Considering Du Bois’ definition of education, a process by which persons are taught to draw out and draw on “human powers”, their own and others, African-Americans should learn their history to solve their problem of community and to build self-consciousness. And this learning should pass by the most obvious medium for a people with a slave past, music. For this purpose, music can be defined as thoughts or life sung or/and dance out by a community of people who have lived a particular experience together. Therefore music bears several meanings which are only understood by those who have taken part in that experience. Only victims of slavery or people of slave descent can express how they felt. For centuries, music has served to talk about life on the southern plantations, to recollect memories of the Great Migration to the North and fugitives’ narratives or to express the Black community’s sorrow in the maintenance of Jim Crow policies in the South and the North. It also serves to voice out the twentieth-century white supremacy.

⁷² Ellicott Wright. 1961. “The Souls of Black Folk and My Larger Education”. *The Journal of Negro Education*. Vol. 30, No. 4. p. 440.

⁷³ Reiland Rabaka. 2003. W. E. B. Du Bois’s Evolving Africana Philosophy of Education. *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4. p. 400

As these events were sung to recall past slave life, a people's history, Carmen Kynard says that: "music, through the blues, jazz and the spirituals, can be used as a blue lyrical blueprint for narrative writing and teaching black consciousness."⁷⁴ Music can be used to teach African-American history and to reimagining educational issues and research related to voice, agency, reading, and literacy in the face of racial oppression and subjugation, he added. Music can help the black community to be culturally aware of their being a different people living in a society where they share a common destiny with different nationalities. And this teaching can be done through the language used in music from slavery to freedom. According to Du Bois one needs to know about "the history of their people in Africa", "the slave trade and history", "abolition", and "the struggle for emancipation."⁷⁵ To put it in a nut shell, music has several social functions which are paramount markers of black cultural affirmation that should be put in Black Studies curricula.

⁷⁴ Carmen Kynard. *Opcit.* P. 361.

⁷⁵ Rabaka, R. *ibid.* p. 401.

2. Black Music, Centeredness, and Teaching Black History

Culture and history study has always been politicized. Any perspective given by a historian serves a certain ideology and a certain people. Fiction literature, fact literature, or history study using successful or failing characters can empower or weaken the targeted audiences according to the purpose of the author. If you tell, for example, a colonial story of African people with the political failure of states and leaders in their political, economic and social ruling without dealing with the colonial powers who created them, you overlook the reality. Centeredness helps the historians, fiction writers, and writers in all domains portray African or Black leadership's failure by taking into account the oppressive colonial power in Africa and racist and domineering system in America that shape a failing black leadership because the cultural values that sustain their leadership are not theirs. Centeredness as advocated by the Afrocentric paradigm gives black people a tool to document history and tell stories that empower black people, not diminish them, that valorize not devalue, that glorify the African and values, not vilify him. The Afrocentric paradigm is a paradigm shift that offers alternatives to straighten the crumbling pedestal of African traditions. Writing in general is ideological-bound and oriented. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the writer or researcher to decide whether he/she will be among the empowered and glorified or the losers, among the proud or the victimized. Centeredness is not only telling the history of Africans or black people by Africans. In addition to that, it is telling the history of Africans that portrays their value system as worthy of emulation and preservation. Afrocentricity is a theory and a paradigm of African resurgence, of African pride, of glorified African leaders and history, not told by westerners or in a western perspective.

It draws its inspiration and authenticity from Kemetic and African traditions. Asante said: “Any real Afrocentric work must constitute a radical critique of the Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as a universal view in the social sciences and humanities. I mean that it is radical in the sense that it suggests a transformative turnabout, and alternative perspective on phenomena.”⁷⁶ In that new perspective centered on African agency, the power of the spoken word is used with dignity not shame, to teach the wisdom of the ancestors, to teach the meaning and power of Nommo, and the harmony it creates when African people celebrate without fear and/or constraint or force to laugh when their hearts are full with hatred and venom.

3. Music as an African Property and Music as Appropriation

We cannot separate theory and paradigm with political discourse. One of the ultimate missions of black educators is to teach the history and meaning of African American music in a re-centering perspective as founded in an African heritage and property. A western perspective of slavery makes black people plead as victims and perpetrators at the same time. In this perspective, white people have no key role in the genocide of the Africans. It makes black people blame their African ancestors for selling them into slavery. Black people have to be re-centered or relocated in history with an African perspective. The same western perspective of history teaches that the spirituals originated from white revival hymns. Talking about the creation of the black spirituals Amiri Baraka said:

⁷⁶ Ama Mazama. 2003. *The afrocentric paradigm*. New Jersey : Trenton : Africa World Press, Inc. p. 37.

Another kind of song that the Negro church produced in America was one based European or American religious (and sometimes secular) songs. In these songs the words often remained the same (with, of course, the natural variances of Negro speech)... Rhythmic syncopation, polyphony, and shifted accents, as well as the altered timbral qualities and vibrato effects of African music were all used by the Negro to transform most of the “white hymns” into Negro spirituals.⁷⁷

This type of assertion does alter the beauty and creative character of black spirituals but it certainly reinforces a sense of appropriation of white culture as long as black people think that religion and God are white and that they have no religious traditions of their own. African spirituality is the foundation of African American spirituals and cultural practices in music, dances, songs, percussions and religious celebrations. When enslaved Africans had been dispossessed of their original languages and deprived of any possibility to build shrines and celebrate the African cult, they adapted their religious by using western culture as a medium. The concept of God has specific meaning and bears the cultural identity of people. Being omnipotent and omnipresent, whether He is named Emitae in Diola, Rog Sene in Serer, Chukwu in Ibo, Murungu in Gikuyu, or God in English, these different people invoke Him using their own language assuming that He understand them and their specific needs. Africans brought their understanding of God in this other side of the Atlantic Ocean. And as long as they remained Africans their conception of God may not have changed even though they worshipped Him in English. Du Bois wrote that Black music is “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the sea...”⁷⁸ I would rather say that Black music is the most beautiful African cultural expression transformed this other side of the sea.

⁷⁷ Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka). *Opcit.* Pp. 46-47.

⁷⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois. *Opcit.* P. 265.

It is important to build a sense of pride among black people by teaching them that that music mainly the black spirituals, is an owned property rather than an appropriation. Music, religious practices and the power of speech are intrinsically related to African traditions. Angela Davis contended that “This song is not rigorously differentiated from everyday speech as came to be the case with European music, for the West African languages incorporate several of the basic structural elements of music: pitch, timbre, and timing.”⁷⁹ Black spirituals go far back to Africa where they took their roots. Music in the African context is the practice of Nommo. And there is an African proverb that says that the spirit of Nommo does not descent without music.⁸⁰ It means that the connection between worshipping God, music and dealing with the daily issues of African communities was there far back in the beginning of the creation of communities in Africa. The concept of Nommo can also be used to establish the fundamental difference between Black music and European music. This differentiation will help to clearly understand in what a black identity is rooted through musical practice and culture. Angela Davis posited:

A future factor differentiating African and European music is the structural emphasis on rhythm as opposed to the emphasis on melody and harmony in European music. Rhythm’s central role derives from its part in the process of *naming*, of imbuing things with the life force, in short, of humanizing the environment. There is a striking parallel to be drawn between the West African notion of Nommo and Karl Marx’s definition of labor as “the living, shaping fire.

⁷⁹ Angela Y. Davis. 1990. *Black Women and Music: A Historical Legacy of Struggle*. New York: Vintage Books .p. 6

⁸⁰.Angela Davis. Lococit. P. 6.

It can be argued, in fact, that the process of “naming” is something of a spiritual transmutation of the labor process-and ideological expression of what human labor can accomplish in society.⁸¹

Nommo is reflected in every aspect of western African culture; as such it pervades labor, naming religious practices, initiations, trials and other social celebrations. The fundamental difference Davis established between Western socialism and Nommo confirms once more that African people cannot develop revolutionary programs by being inspired by Karl Marx’s socialist ideology because the values that sustain it are different from African reality of labor and values. Leopold Sedar Senghor had shown his skepticism in this sense by defining a new orientation of African socialism in the 1930s.

He thought that the Marx who wrote the *Capital* would abandon that moral language and analyzed the condition of the working class through technical concepts, for example that of extortion of surplus value. While Althusser considered Marx’s changing of interest as a break in the advent of science as an “anti-humanist theory”, Senghor saw it as self-betrayal by Marx repudiating his identity as a philosopher and giving to his views the appearance of dogmatic economic petrifications. Senghor designed the task of an African re-reading of Marx then by stating that it was:

1. To save Marx the humanist, metaphysician, dialectician and artist from a narrowly materialist, economic, positivist, realist Marxism;
2. To invent an African path to socialism which is inspired by black spiritualities, and which continues the tradition of communalism on the continent.⁸²

⁸¹ Angela Y. Davis. *Lococit*. P. 6.

⁸² Leopold Sedar Senghor. 1964. *Libertel I, Négritude et Humanisme*. Paris: Seuil.

Senghor's view is an African-centered perspective of understanding and implementing socialism taking into account African people's spiritual beliefs.

The aforementioned opposition between the functional character of black music and European music still appears in the evolution of the history of black people in America as it is used by westerners to implement a policy of domination and discrimination over African Americans. In the history of the early recording of black musicians in the 1920s as documented by Angela Davis, we learn the attempt by the white power to disorganize the black community by implementing a policy of discrimination that put down the black bluesmen and diminish their power and image while promoting the black blues women.

Knowing the fundamental role the black male plays in the black family, this attempt is a well-organized plot of hundreds of years to destroy black values in America. Angela Davis said:

The women were given priority over men as recording artists to the reductive marketing strategies of the then-embryonic recording industry, strategies we still see reflected today in the industry's efforts to categorize-or, in effect, to segregate culturally- different genres of music that in fact claim an increasingly diverse listening public. The companies' attempts to construct and tap a new black market were elaborated around the assumption that because the initial successes were with women's blues, only women could be successful recording artists. Between 1923 and 1926-when Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey respectively recorded their first songs-few men, aside from Papa Charlie Jackson (who also did two major duets with Rainey), were signed up by Paramount and Columbia, the two major companies of that period.⁸³

⁸³ Angela Y. Davis. 1998. *Blues Legacy and Black Feminism*. New York: Vintage Books. P. xii.

As a professor of history of consciousness, Angela Davis is very much a positive example of building self-pride, strong identity and black consciousness among black people using the Afrocentric paradigm to teach blues narratives. Toni Morrison witnessed on the cover of the same book that the book is a complete revelation to her and a serious re-education. Re-educating black people amounts to a process of relocation or re-centering the majority of black people in America who do not know their history, therefore they are alienated. To regain a sense of power and psychological balance in ownership I propose my theory of building consciousness among black people.

4. Building Consciousness: An African-Centered Perspective

In every culture, education has always been an empowering endeavor. It has been a well-defined process of nurturing a positive consciousness. My theory of Black consciousness has three main phases:

- Building Self-Pride in teaching and learning African history
- Building a strong Identity as African
- Building Consciousness of being Africans in America.

Some questions are important to come to understand my purpose. Pride in one's identity should be sustained by experiences in your history that are important markers in your life. Let's look at African Americans' experience in American to see if there are any events or phases that can contribute to be proud of an American identity. What can African Americans be proud of?

- Slavery or auction blocks?
- Being victims of lynching?

- Disfranchisement?
- Deprivation of education?
- Migration?
- Fighting for civil rights?
- Segregation?
- Mass incarceration of Black males?

Therefore, being American is not taken for granted for African Americans because they always have to fight to get the basic rights that are taken for granted for white people. So how can African Americans claim an American identity they cannot be proud of because of all the bitter experiences they have lived or still live? Conversely, being African is taken for granted for African Americans because nobody will deny them that identity. They do not need to fight for it or claim it. They are Africans. But that consciousness has to be nurtured in order to relocate black people in America. Hence, they have to follow the process I propose earlier in building consciousness. The Afrocentric paradigm is better indicated to reach that goal following this methodology:

- Teaching positive attitude of Africans and black history, politics, and leadership as worthy of emulation and preservation, in order to relocate or re-center dislocated or decentered black people and make them feel self-pride;
- Teaching African cosmology and African spirituality as the foundation of black intellectual endeavor;
- Claiming African American spirituals as property and not as appropriation;
- Restoring the power and worth of the spoken word: voice and song are intrinsically linked in African culture;

- Using musical narratives as a way of teaching black history to younger generations of black people in African-centered schools.

These necessary steps in Black education will help build consciousness of being black and fight for the recognition of a national holiday for black people in America.

The connection between music, history and the importance of the celebration of a national holiday in a people's identity has been given in the following example in Jamaica:

Another respondent, after discussing slavery, commented "the ole people nuh like how dem dish out August". He was referring to the fact that Emancipation Day, formerly the first day of August and parochially called 'August,' no longer exists and we have instead a holiday on the first Monday of August to celebrate Independence. This man felt that there had been a conspiracy by the establishment to down-play his history. And there is some truth to this. Part of this celebration, as my informants give it, was the singing of songs which had obviously been composed by freedmen and handed down. One such is:

First of August morning

March round the booth

Then you see how we get in freedom now

Jubilee aa come.⁸⁴

It is important to mention that African Americans are the only race in the world that does not have a significant holiday of its own to celebrate. Every other race has its own holiday. The European Americans celebrate the fourth of July as the day they were freed from British domination.

⁸⁴ E. Brodber. 1987. Black consciousness and popular music in Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s In: *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 61, no: 3/4, Leiden, 145-160

Africans from the continent celebrate their liberation from colonial rule in a particular day of the year. African American should celebrate December eighteenth as the day the 13 Amendment was ratified. The law which was passed in 1865 put an end to slavery in the United States and gave black people their freedom, and any other passed laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Reconstruction Act of 1867, and other subsequent acts of law depended on the 13th Amendment. But when black people were freed from forced servitude, they were scattered all over the country, trying to find a way to make a living individually. And because of that individualism of a people who were more used living in community, there is still no centralized issue that overcomes individual differences among black people. African collectiveness has always been opposed to European individualism; they are two fundamental different cultural values that respectively shape the African man and the European man. In an attempt to raise consciousness among black people, Asante has presented an excerpt of the Zulu Declaration here:

.....

Consciousness is that in which all things have their origins;

It does not change; it exists from eternity to eternity;

It is an infinite cluster of clusters itself;

It is forever evolving in response to the challenge of its nature...

My neighbor has a mind;

It, also, comprehends all things.

My neighbor and I have the same origins;

We have the same live-experience and a common destiny;

We are the obverse and reverse side of one entity;

.....

His survival is a precondition to my survival.

.....

Society is a collective sovereignty;

It exists to ensure that my neighbor and I realize the promise of being human.

I have no right to anything I deny my neighbor.⁸⁵

There should be more a historical teaching of what being a human is in an African-centered paradigm of thought on the one hand, and a teaching of the cause of black people's present lack of sense of collectiveness to understand and create a more unified body to face the challenges of this new era on the other hand. African Americans need a stronger consciousness of being African in America to be able to solve their problems that are more cultural than anything else. By striving for a national holiday, African Americans will make the younger generations be aware of what freedom really means, how it exists for black people, who had contributed to that existence, and how it has been always necessary for black people to activate to gain it. This is the legacy that will be passed on to the next generations.

⁸⁵ Molefi Kete Asante. 2007. *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group. P. 196.

CONCLUSION

From its origin since the transplantation of African American people on American soil, music, from the slave spirituals about struggle and personal empowerment to the blues, and its modern form jazz, rhythm, and hip hop, has always been influenced by the experience of African American in America. Therefore, there is, probably, no better way to keep African-American history alive than by taking a look at the incredible music that has been contributed to American history by African American people. Music has help express an identity and consciousness of being a black person in the American society. The influence of African Americans on folk music has been immeasurable. Many of the songs that have come to be synonymous with struggle, empowerment, indictment, human rights, and perseverance have come from the African American culture. From its earliest form to modern music, the music of African American people has embodied the struggle of a marginalized and excluded people from America official history. Due to its multicultural influence, the hybrid character of black and Diaspora identity through its music provides an interesting field of research for the benefit of human history interests and modern studies. Nowadays, Hip Hop is a cultural wealth, and a means of political, social, and economic integration in America to be appreciated and theorize worldwide in a new context of globalization. But it is interesting to research on how all happened in the past from black spirituals and the blues for the music to be transformed and to bear the history of black folk in the United States. Further research can focus on how to adapt politically committed music to fight post-colonial, oppressive regimes and subtle discrimination in Africa and worldwide.

The spirituals and the blues have served to document the history of struggle for freedom and equal rights, to raise cultural awareness, and to build black consciousness in African American people. The purpose of this work is also to raise awareness among artists throughout the world and urge them to be more politically committed to liberating their people from anti-democratic governments and from any kind of exploitation.

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