

But it was left for Dvořák, Coleridge-Taylor, Henry F. Gilbert and Henry Thacker Burleigh to lead the way in revealing the artistic possibilities of the Negro folk-song and its idiom, both in stricter and freer, and in larger and smaller forms. Aside from the national clement, the religious appeal, the vivid poetic fancy, the tunefulness and the lilt of the spirituals go far in accounting for their vogue as evidenced by the numerous utilizations, adaptations, arrangements, transcriptions, etc., accorded them by both Negro and white composers. Some six hundred spirituals may be found in the various collections, and a developmental study of the songs will repay the student interested alike from the religious, the musical, the literary, the psychological and the sociological points of view. But better than all is it to hear them sung by an unaccompanied group in their native habitat.

In recent years, interest in the secular songs of the Negro has proceeded apace, and a comparative study of these with the spirituals presents some illuminating analogies.

I. RACIAL CONTINUITY IN AFRAMERICAN MUSIC

Students of the human sciences who claim to be able to give exhaustive explanations of human phenomena in terms of heredity and environment doubtless claim too much. Yet to fail to accord due recognition to these factors is to fall short of a possible completeness of description. Racial qualities are extremely insistent and pertinacious, and nowhere more so than in cases involving the subconscious. Even had immigration ceased with the Revolution, it is improbable that we could talk to-day of an American race. The racial melting-pot brews slowly, and where, as in America, the segregation of the blacks is so widespread, the fundamental characteristics of the group in such semi-isolation may be expected to linger on. It would seem then that any serious study of Aframerican music should properly begin with a survey of those traits which the African, coming to American shores, was destined to turn to account in the production here of his own music; should endeavor to trace the persistence of those traits throughout the various phases of his musical development as affected by a changing social environment; and lastly, in the light of such study, should attempt some forecast as to the most fruitful musical evolution toward which these race values might be directed.

Only sketchily can the present essay follow the course indicated above, Section I concerning itself with the first two proposals, Section II with the more conjectural third.

RACE VALUES IN AFRAMERICAN MUSIC

By PAUL FRITZ LAUBENSTEIN

PRESERVATION AND VOGUE OF THE NEGRO SPIRITUALS

THE main steps in the process by which the sacred folk-music of the Negro has been saved and has come into its own can readily be traced. The emancipated freedman was only too willing to allow this, to him unpleasant, reminder of slave days to perish with the conditions that brought it forth. The Negro had already learned from his master to "line out" hymn tunes, and by 1867 these had begun to supplant his own more humble spirituals. Nor were the earlier songs apt to be any more to the taste of the aspiring Negro student of the *post-bellum* era. At positive factors in the preservation of this music, one may point to the magazine articles of the fifties and sixties; to the publication of "Slave Songs of the United States" by McKim, Allen and Ware in 1867; to the appreciation of its religious and musical value by educators from the North in the decade following the Civil War; to the pioneer work of Fisk University, and then of Hampton Institute, in collecting these spirituals; and still later to the efforts of Calhoun, Atlanta and Tuskegee. In the seventies came the *Ausbreitung*, with the traveling troupes from Fisk and Hampton presenting new beauties to the eyes of an astonished world. With this early work of collecting and popularization the names of Spaulding, Higginson, Miss McKim, Ware, Allen, J. M. Brown, Seward, Fenner, White, Pike, Marsh and Cable are inseparably connected.

Following this more sentimental awakening came the recognition of the national significance of the Negro music. Yet Dvořák was not the first to call the attention of Americans to this fact. The reviewer of "Slave Songs" in *The Nation* for Nov. 21, 1867, writes: "We utter no new truth when we affirm that whatever of nationality there is in the music of America she owes to her dusky children. Negro minstrelsy sprang from them, and from negro minstrelsy our truly national airs." Indeed, "Evangelist" in "Dwight's Journal of Music," in 1856, had already written: "The only musical population of this country are the Negroes of the South." And in the Preface to the 1891 Hampton collection of spirituals, Edward Everett Hale is cited as referring to them as the only American music.

a. *The Perceptual Consciousness of the African*

Like primitive peoples everywhere, the African untouched by European influence lives his life predominantly upon the plane of his sense impressions. These, taken at their face value, form the starting-point of whatever view of the universe is his. Epistemologically he is a realist of the first water. Corresponding to his acceptance of appearances as real is the immediacy of his emotional reactions to his sense impressions. To recognize that the consciousness of the African villager concerns itself with percepts rather than with more generalized concepts, and with the affective and the volitional rather than with the reflective and the speculative is to take the first necessary step toward understanding the native African genius and its various products—especially religion and music.

The perceptual nature of the African's consciousness is reflected in those dialects which have not yet passed beyond the early isolating stage to the agglutinative and inflectional types of language. Here the primitive mind is not able to grasp in one mental act a manifold of qualities, functions, etc., and bundle them all up implicitly and neatly into one word which immutably serves as a generalized conceptual summary of that whole class. Rather must it split the individual thing into its separate perceptual components and run them together explicitly as beads on a string. H. H. Johnson and Carl Meinhof instance the native practice of naming a thing in terms of its uses or its most striking qualities, and of dissecting every verb implying a composite act into the separate phases of the action. Hence the sum of qualities, functions, etc., indicated to the Occidental by the one word *pencil*, for this African becomes *stone-write-thing*; *kitchen* becomes *some-thing-cook-place*; *nail* becomes *iron-head-broad*. To express the idea, "He gave the child a pencil," the native would refer first to the "taking" of the pencil, and then to the "handing" of it to the child. The same disjunctive tendency is seen in the larger grouping of words into sentences. "They are bad people who kill; we fear them" becomes "They—these they person—they bad—they who kill—we fear them"; or, "The tree falls; dost thou see it?" becomes "This tree—this here—this falls; thou this seest?" (In the face of this common repetition of the demonstrative pronoun in obedience to perceptual demands, is the American Negro's fondness for "dis yere" to be wondered at?) The result of this tendency is a certain bulkiness in sentence structure and in language,

not however incompatible with fluency. It is the price the African pays for his vivid impressions.

The keenness of the black man's senses has often been commented upon. He "smells out" witches, his ears are eyes for the darkness; the Bantu dialects are rich in descriptive adverbs. Junod relates that "for the wonderfully acute senses of the sons of the bush, everything—man, beasts, objects of Nature—speaks and thinks, and these adverbs try to express in picturesque words these actions, this language of the things, sounds as well as movements, attitudes, feelings, etc." For the African to "think" is to see and to draw a mental picture, to hear sounds and to become vocal, to perceive muscular contractions and to move about, to feel emotion and to express it. Miss Kingsley refers to the perpetual uproar of the African village and by contrast the intensity of silence when it does come, and describes the Bantu as thinking externally in a loud voice rather than internally. The African bushman draws large drafts upon life for the satisfaction of his auditory, his visual, his motor and his affective consciousness. Those drafts receive payment, among other ways, in his perception of meanings in sound and rhythm of which the white man is utterly ignorant, in his great susceptibility to music, rhythm and dance, and in his prevailing animism. Highly conceptual speech and the logical reasoning of the Occidental would not be sufficiently representative of, or related to, his vivid perceptual consciousness for him to assign the important place to them in his scheme of things as does the former. His visions have to do with real things and with real people; his "voices" can have only a personal source, motion can also be only a mark of sentient life. His animism leads him to talk aloud to his weapons, to have conversations with spirit guardians or familiar spirits and with those of dead relatives or friends; and, according to Miss Kingsley, "I have often seen a man, sitting at a bush fire or in a village palaver house, turn round and say, 'You remember that, mother?' to the ghost that to him was there." (The Aframerican workman has been known to apostrophise a tree, or butter, or to talk with his hammer or his hoe.)

The presence of this perceptual consciousness may be traced in the African's religion as practiced on his native heath, in his peculiar appropriation of Christianity in America, in that unique psalmody which it inspired—and beyond. A knowledge of certain features most distinctive of African religion cannot fail therefore to deepen our understanding of the life of the Negro in America, and particularly that life out of which came his music. For

without his religious susceptibilities, the ascendancy of Christianity over him would have been problematic, and without his contact with the Christian faith, there would have been no spirituals.

b. African Religion

Primitive Negro religion may be traced to two sources, in both of which can be found points of contact with Judaism and a Jewish type of Christianity, and which help to explain the appeal that the white man's religion, or certain aspects of it, made to him. There may have lingered in the background of the slave's mind some dim reminiscence of an aboriginal African pygmy's (1) "pure monotheism," referred to by Dr. Guenter Tessman, belief in God the creator to whom by (2) a resurrection of the body from the dead the whole man returns after death. Superimposed upon the original pygmy stock of beliefs and overshadowing it was the younger Bantu spiritism, the product of new needs, new demands. Characteristic of this was the acceptance of (3) a universal dualism of good and evil spirits which included a story of (4) the fall of man, and which with its belief in (5) spirits as representative of deity made easy within Christianity the transition to the belief in angels and in the localization of evil in one spirit, (6) Satan. If the perfectly good spirit God has an abode of perfect bliss, namely (7) heaven, its dualistic counterpart for Satan (8) Sheol, was not difficult to conceive. Such a counterpart Prof. E. W. Hopkins finds in the Dahomey Srahman (*dazé*). As there were good and evil spirits, so there were (9) God's men and (10) God's enemies among human beings. The feeling of being "God's man," of dependence on him, is a highly developed sentiment among the blacks—one is God's property and God must provide and care for his own. (11) Baptism was not unknown in Guinea, and (12) three and seven were used as sacred numbers.

It is tempting to refer all such fundamental similarities in ideas and practices to derivation from a common parent Asiatic stem, to early Semitic contacts via Arabia, or to the later Islamic invasion (similarly with the use by the blacks of the interval of the augmented second in music, so frequent in the Orient); and there may be truth in the matter. Yet history is replete, too, with examples of independent origins of identical beliefs and usages, when various groups, perhaps even heterogeneous and living remote from one another, react in the same way to certain phenomena of Nature. The question of a possible Negro-Semitic kinship is an intriguing one, but I rest content here with the

presentation of the resemblances and allow the ethnologists and philologists to do their worst. Thus continuing, I might mention, as shared in varying degrees by both Semite and Negro, the tendency to think in terms of pictures, sounds, motion; a fondness for parable and riddle, and a power of comparison enabling them to discover spiritual truths in homely facts or happenings; the use of taunt songs (surviving especially among the "colored" Creoles in America and in the Antilles); the persistence of necromancy; the scarcity of pure nature poetry; a susceptibility to forces of the Unseen—the tendency to attribute to the working of unseen powers what others would ascribe to human initiative; the prominent place assigned in religion, not so much to dogma or theology, but to emotion (it is well to remember that the doctrinal and the speculative sections of the Bible derive for the most part from the Greek genius rather than from the Hebrew); the use of the pronoun "I" in lyrical utterance with both an individual and a communal significance; the tabu of certain names; and the cryptic use of words such as the *Ku Pamba* in the Ba-Ronga dialect; in this connection, too, may be mentioned the African secret and conventional languages.

Of a semi-religious character are a few other African traits which have left their traces in America: the love of the mother and the persistence of the thought of her; the attribution of death, not to natural causes, but to the power of malignant spirits; compare, for instance, the following lines from an African song, in which the wizards who caused death are cursed

"Go away, wizard! Killer of men!
You take them during the night!"

with the lines of a spiritual

"Early one morning death came creeping in my room,
(variant—"knocking at my door")
Stole my mother away!"

the holding of the "wake" over the dead body of a relative or friend; and the desire for a fine burial for oneself, relatives and friends.

c. The Great Change

The Negro's appropriation of the white man's religion was facilitated, first of all, by the linguistic and tribal disintegration which occurred in America. The fact that slaves from various

districts of Africa, as they met on the plantation, found themselves unable to understand each others' dialects, and that some conversation with their owners was involved in the discharge of their duties, laid upon the new arrivals the necessity of learning their masters' tongue as a common medium of communication. With the obliteration of tribal distinctions and organizations, the differentiating group notions and practices tended to disappear, and particularly those practices and institutions which the planter took pains to eradicate, such as the native priesthood, the licentious orgies and dances at their festivals, witchcraft executions, human sacrifices, and repulsive burial customs. Yet, some of the age-old, deep-seated racial ideas lingered on in the subconscious memory, ready to be caught up and given a new development in the new religion.

On the other hand, the African could scarcely fail to be impressed by the manner in which his master's religion made him superior to diabolical agencies, to accidents, disease, weather, and the like. Gradually, by the unconscious, silent influence of example and suggestion working upon his keen religious susceptibilities—perhaps more by this than by anything else—and by the deliberate but somewhat desultory efforts of owner and missionary, the great change to his own Christianity was wrought.

But, individualist as always, the Negro insisted upon making a choice. That choice was determined by the demands of his perceptual consciousness, for the exercise of which he found plenty of room in current Methodist and Baptist beliefs and practices. And as he chose these particular types of Christianity best suited to his needs, so he proceeded to choose the elements which were to make up for him his particular type of Methodist and Baptist religion. What this choice involved is reflected in the spirituals in which it is so largely embodied. From the religious and the musical points of view we may be thankful that the choices were such as they were, and that the emotional Methodism and the dramatic symbolism of the Baptists were ready at hand to satisfy the cravings of the Negro temperament. There would have been a different tale to tell, as regards his sacred folk-songs, had the Negro's religious environment been solely a formal Anglicanism or a set, ritualistic Romanism—both aristocratic in spirit and in procedure. In a Roman Catholic environment like that of New Orleans the Creole slave had indeed his Place Congo to which he could resort on Sunday. Here he indulged in his primitive dances, and thence he gave us some interesting dance tunes, satirical and love songs, but few, if any, religious songs.

Where the Negro adopted Romanism, his religion easily became an external matter, a veneer for his African cultural and religious ideas. Where Methodist and Baptist remained supreme, however, his sacred folk-songs make clear the extent to which his new religion had penetrated his life; and at the same time they show that he had by no means left his perceptual consciousness behind him.

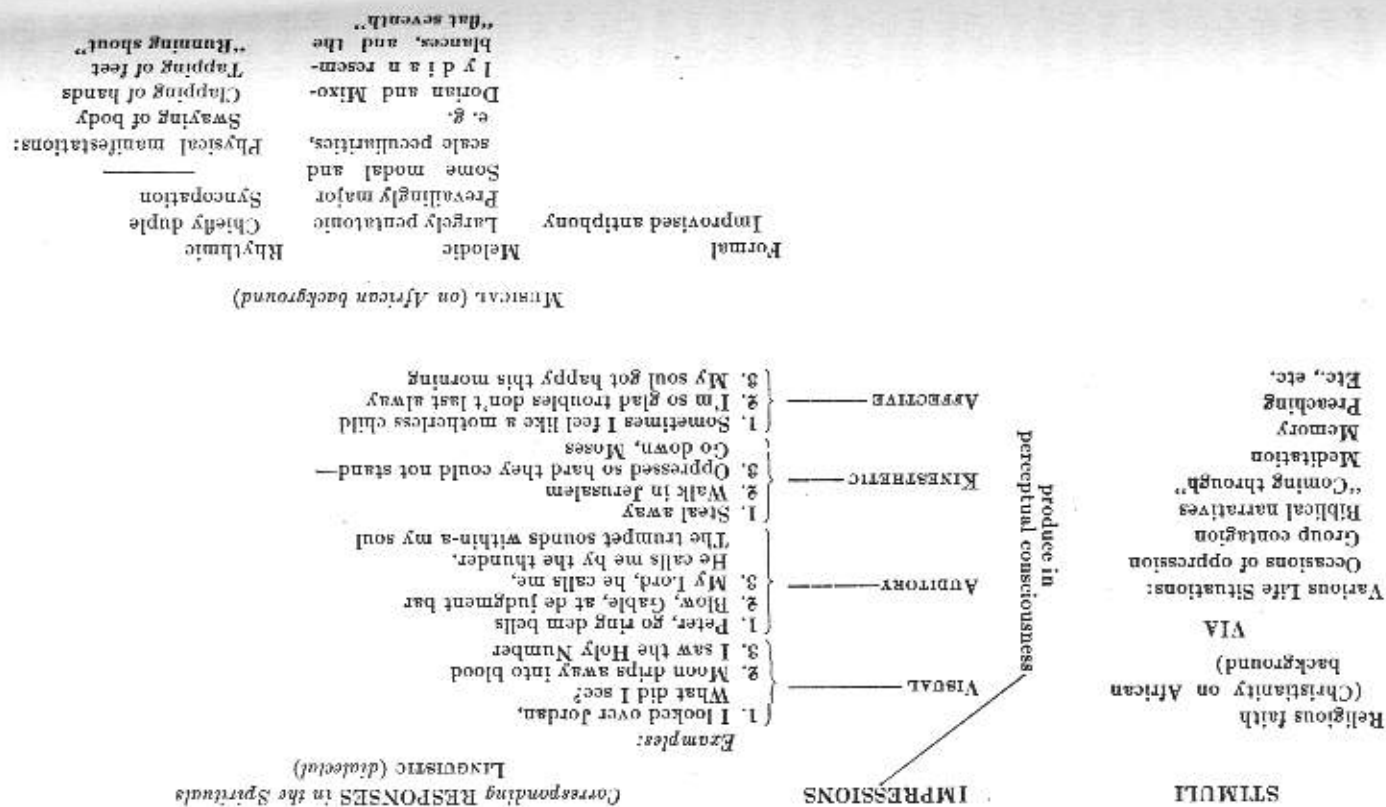
The Negro still felt the urge in his meditation to think aloud in song, to turn life itself into music, to sing his flowing consciousness into expression, felt it natural that singing should be "a kind of melodious musing aloud." His "voices" still follow him

"Way up on de mountain-top, Lord,
I heard God talkin', Lord."

and the spirituals abound in "auditory images"—impossible hybrid! (The lack of a satisfactory term for an auditory percept characterized by duration and movement reveals by its absence the extent to which we Occidentals live in a world fashioned for us by an eye-regulated consciousness. As a designation for such an auditory percept, the term *kinaudiencept* suggested itself to me. This would indicate the seizing as one inner act of a series of sounds or tones, ranging all the way from our awareness of a motif as a unit, to such a thing as the extraordinary consciousness of Mozart in being able to hear, as he relates, *tout d'un coup* and before composing it, the whole movement of a symphony! This matter of our eye-mindedness raises a larger question: Is it an *a priori* prejudice that withholds us from believing that an infinitely various Reality has nothing to offer also by way of Her (?) ear-gate, particularly to the susceptible listener-in who has fulfilled the conditions necessary to favorable reception? Why this deliberate impoverishment and epistemological semi-suicide? Why not *Weltanhoerung* as well as *Weltanschauung*?)

Visual images are no less abundant—brief, picturesque cinemas projected in color in three dimensions. A certain Aunt Dinah at her "a-gettin' through" (conversion) saw the devil with his pitchfork and club-foot, and learned this song: "Rule Death in His Arms"—"and when I learn dat song, de Lawd spoke peace to my soul." Such an experience—and it is doubtless a typical one—reveals the visual, the auditory, the kinesthetic consciousness which produced the spirituals. Prevailing they have to do with things or persons seen, with sounds or motions of one sort or another, through all of which play the feelings. Proceeding from the Negro's perceptual consciousness, the following chart sets forth in a rough way the psychological descent of the spiritual:

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DESCENT OF THE AFRAMERICAN SPIRITUAL



Naturally it is the varied combinations and emphases, the continual shiftings and blendings of these types, even in one and the same spiritual, which sustain the interest and lend charm to the songs. They never lose themselves in abstract speculation, and the theologizings of Paul, of the Johannine school, and of Hebrews are a negligible quantity in them. This may be seen by glancing at the subjects which were popular for treatment. The constant mingling of types within the same spiritual—a fluidity due to high-handed interchange between the songs, to recasting and improvisation, mirroring also the fluctuating perceptual consciousness of the Negro—makes classification of the spirituals on any one basis at best an unsatisfactory affair, representative only of certain broad categories as contained in the key verses, but not necessarily of the spirituals as wholes. I have before me six classifications of the Negro songs (including none of those of the more recent secular collections), all of which differ markedly from each other, and every one of which involves a mixing of classes, an almost-to-be-expected reflection of the kaleidoscopic character of the individual songs. Professor Work's classification as such proceeds quite consistently, however, on the affective basis, which is probably also the most effective one. For, however varied the perceptual impressions set forth in a spiritual, informing each one can usually be discovered a certain fundamental emotional undertone to which it may be reduced. Yet classifications on any basis, single or mixed, have this value: that they reveal the elements which the Negro chose from the Christianity that was presented to him to make up the type of religion most satisfactory to him. These elements appealed to him from the point of view of his situation at the time, from that of his African heritage and perceptual consciousness, or from that of both.

The result of this contact of the African with a new religion and a new environment was to produce a new eclecticism characterized by its apocalyptic with its other-worldly note, by its individualism, its emotionalism, and its love of the concrete, as over against speculative tendencies—whereof the spirituals are witnesses.

d. The Antiphonal Form a Race Value—Its Social Significance.

1. In Africa

So general is the use of the antiphonal form in the musical practice of the Negro, both in Africa and in America, that I feel

justified in making some reference to it in a discussion of racial continuity in Aframerican music; but it will also be found to have more than a technical musical significance.

By the antiphonal form I mean here simply the alternation of solo with chorus. That such a form should arise from the Negro's perceptual consciousness seems natural enough. If a native, with his tendency to think externally and vocally, upon a religious occasion, or at work or at any other time, happens upon a line with a good sound and a rhythmic lilt, and perhaps one which will facilitate and organize motion, heighten vitality, or label a vivid picture or affective state, what more natural than that such a line should appeal to the sensuous fancy of those near by, and that they should catch it up and repeat it after the manner of a refrain as part of the experience of the moment? The maker of the song would then be free to develop the idea or feeling of the initial or key verse, which has now become the regular chorus. If the inspiration of the leader fails him, he has recourse to familiar verses of other songs, suggested to him, perhaps, more by sound and rhythmic associations than because of logical fitness—a negligible factor in such a case! The improvised antiphon thus begotten may or may not be remembered—easy come, easy go. If it is preserved, it may still further be creatively wrought into the common experience by subsequent singers, who may refashion it in different ways according to the whim or the needs of the moment. It thus becomes common property and may be carried from one tribe or place to another, living its life in a variety of forms, simple and complex. But however wide the departure from the original, whatever variation of the form is invented, the general style of the music remains. 'So careful seems Nature of the type, so careless of the single instance.'

The antiphonal form appears to be known and used throughout black Africa. Sometimes the soloist begins the song (naturally, if it is a fresh one), sometimes the chorus. At times there are two choruses. The leader may vary the order of the lines of the text at will. The music is first of all, *occasional*, life rendered vocal, having to do with as wide a range of subjects, small and great, as life itself. This helps to explain why the music is *improvisatory* in character; and when a chorus lends its support, or when there is more than one improviser, it assumes a *communal origin and significance*. If one improviser becomes tired, another may take over the function of poet. Current events serve as convenient grist for the maker's mill; and woe to the passing "illiterate" European who may be so unfortunate as to bear some physical

peculiarity! The literary types of those songs which have been preserved range all the way from lyric, elegiac, epic, dramatic and work-songs, on the one hand, to incantations, songs to animals and to spirits, on the other. Among the Ba-Rongas, Junod noted such songs as: a complaint of the childless woman, the complaint of a Nkuna boy beaten by his masters, "the stones are very hard" (*i. e.*, to break), the song of a man held fast by a crab while the oncoming waves of the sea crept ever nearer, songs of love, of death, of mourning, of war, of the chase, satirical, play-and dance-songs, and one used to drive away the grasshoppers.

Mrs. Burlin quotes a song (*Chindau*) inspired by the news of work—"money in Kamben"; others grew out of such homely experiences as hunting a cow, or digging out porcupines from the garden and killing them; still another from the dwarfs in West Africa runs "The white man is a good man and gives the Abongo salt"; in others the mention of cattle plays an important part. Dr. William H. Sheppard, long a missionary in the Congo, tells of the practical uses to which the "call and sponse" (to use Professor Talley's term) is put: there are those that serve for people lost in the forest, those to be employed in case of fire, and those indicating the approach of enemies.

While the antiphonal song thus plays a vital part in African life and is a sociological source of no mean value, at the same time its very impromptu character, and the fact that it grows out of, and is molded by, life situations and is often of communal origin, make such things as proportion and balance in form matters of secondary consequence. To attempt the reduction to classes of well-defined, symmetrical musical forms of even the relatively few African songs noted by Engel, Bowditch, Mrs. Burlin, Junod, Tiersot, Ellis, Ballanta-Taylor, Hornbostel and others, would be a vain undertaking. The urge which created these songs is not primarily an esthetic, but a vital one—if Professor Whitehead will allow us to draw such a distinction. The former, like the European's use of conceptual language, was not the Negro's major interest.

d. The Antiphonal Form a Race Value—Its Social Significance

2. In America

Substitute for the geographical and the cultural scenery of the foregoing that which appertained to slave life in America, and one might be describing the course of Aframerican music. For in

his new environment the Negro found the same use for his music as in the Dark Continent, and again the antiphon was the large and flexible mold through which he musicalized his experiences. And as though to guard against the loss of such a vehicle, circumstances early acquainted the slave with the practice in his master's church of "lining out" the hymns, a practice which resembles the African form sufficiently to act as a convenient jog to a short racial memory.

In America the Negro's songs reflect his life with the white man and his contact with Christianity, the two greatest factors in his new *modus vivendi*. The Christian gospel, with its note of hope and release and its promises, appealed to the slave. Humble and personal still the songs might be, but the new frame of reference in which his spiritual life is now set lifts them out of the commonplace—a proceeding not untypical of the best Christianity—and gives them a new dignity. Even his work-songs were often religious.

Testimony it is to the strength of the hold which certain aspects of this religion took upon him in the *ante-bellum* days, that the great majority of his songs created then have this religious frame of reference. These are the ones whose qualities fitted them to survive. The paucity of the extant secular songs of the early period is probably due to no accident. And one must remember, too, that his music is but the lyrical reflection of his very consciousness—as the psalms of Israel reflect that of the Jews. Some indication of the tremendous leap in cultural development which took place within a little over a century can be obtained by comparing the doggerel African "music," both tonally and as regards literary content, with the spirituals. One is reminded of the infinitely superior narratives of the Hebrews as contrasted with the earlier kindred Babylonian literature. In both cases it was a superior religion which must be held chiefly accountable for the great change; as in both cases, too, there was a race with a religious susceptibility to build upon. Such comparisons between earlier and later achievements of people of the same cultural stock and living within the same cultural epoch afford reliable bases for the measurement of progress, and are most instructive. Other comparisons are apt to lack sufficient common meeting-ground to yield truly informative results.

If the African songs in their form reflect the straggling luxuriance of the wilderness, the Aframerican songs tend to gain in beauty by a closer knitting together of parts into more formal, well-balanced structures. The simple antiphon between solo and

chorus is still the fundamental type. Yet new varieties which are also hard to classify tend to develop spontaneously according to no law but the inspiration of the moment. Such a song as "Good News, Chariot's Coming" is an expanded form quite popular, alternating antiphonal solo and chorus used as refrain, with antiphonal solo and chorus employing different verses. "Arise, Shine" belongs to this type. "Every Time I Feel the Spirit Moving" is an alternation of antiphonal solo and chorus used as refrain, with pure solo verses supported by chorus *à bouche fermée*. "Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" alternates chorus with solo quasi-obbligato, with solo recitative and chorus. "March On" is an alternation of antiphonal solo and refrain as verses, with a regular chorus. "Great Camp Meeting" alternates solo and refrain with a second solo and chorus. So one might continue. The unconscious art of the Negro created various patterns; but the one common feature, the antiphonal form, remained. Once a song was started, it was a matter of "Song, thou art afoot, Take thou what course thou wilt!" The urge here too was vital, not consciously esthetic; but the variety of pattern and form thus unwittingly produced may in itself be regarded as an esthetic achievement. As the spirituals were common property, no qualms were felt in incorporating as much or as little of one spiritual into another as one desired, particularly when the Muse nodded. It is the real nature of these songs to live an oral and a fluid, not a printed and a stereotyped existence. Versions of any one spiritual may therefore be numerous, and the manner of singing them will also vary from place to place. In the case of the spirituals mentioned above, the tradition is that supported by the late Professor J. W. Work, of Fisk University.

What has been said concerning the origin of the African song from the Negro's perceptual consciousness, applies equally well to the birth of the spiritual. In America, too, the Negro "sang his flowing consciousness into song," occasionally, improvisationally, communally, with results that are well known. We are fortunate in having several interesting examples of sacred and secular songs in the very act of being born which well illustrate the three main features just mentioned. Lack of space forbids repeating Col. Higginson's oft-quoted tale of the genesis of a spiritual as he was being rowed across from Beaufort, S. C., to Ladies' Island. The fact that the Negro author of the song in question called it a "spiritual" although it was a secular work song shows that the term was doubtless a generic one. Professor Talley relates how he beheld the birth of a dance rhyme from the dance,

where the raising of the dust suggested to the leader the words, "Setch a kickin' up san'," whereupon the assembled crowd "based" him with "Jonah's band," and the song was on its way. But Mrs. Burlin gives the most impressive accounts of the manner in which "spiritual songs" come into being as a result of group contagion. After the manner of the New Testament "gifts," they are the simultaneous product of those "possessed," composed by "no one in particular and by every one in general," the cumulative crystallization into musical form of groanings which do in these cases become uttered, their "call and sponse" form genetically adapted to communal authorship, and the words used having the particular content given them at the moment.¹

Rather than abridge Mrs. Burlin's poetic presentations of the incidents at Calhoun and in Virginia, I prefer to refer the reader to the accounts themselves in *THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY* of January, 1919. The story of the origin of "O Gwine Away" well illustrates how a life-situation is built into a song in a praise meeting by the friends of an unfortunate who (like the African boy previously mentioned) had that day tasted the master's lash. Said the victim later, in referring to the composers of the song, "They work it in. Some's very good singers and know how, till dey get it right." This ancestral habit of vocalizing the daily life is further evidenced in the "Mr. Mackright" song; in the enigmatic "Rain Fall and Wet Becca Lawton" ("Becky Martin" in Col. Higginson's collection); in the "Rattler Song" which hymns the snake that bit the singer in the heel and then darted into "a holler lawg"; and in the song

"Ezekiel said he spied de train a-comin',
He got on board an' she never stop a-runnin'."

In the wake scene of the play "Porgy" occurs an excellent illustration of the birth of a spiritual.

¹This last is a fact of considerable importance in the understanding of both the African and the Aframerican songs. The Negro brought with him a linguistic fluidity and a verbal individualism common enough in Africa, but puzzling to whites, whereby to words or even to nonsense sounds temporary, local or occasional meanings are attached, which the "wise" and those made wise alone henceforth understand. "Nonsense" verses are not to be evaluated by the standard of logical coherence (that is merely a mental mannerism of Occidentals), but in the light of the original experience, for which by common consent it is agreed certain sounds shall henceforth stand as the perceptual label to recall or suggest the experience or concomitant consciousness. (One is reminded here of the special meanings attached to certain words or numbers in Hebrew apocalyptic.) Preference, of course, was always given to a pleasing succession of sounds, having an appealing lilt or rhythm.

The work-life, too, offered many a shining occasion that could be turned into effective song. The perceptual consciousness of the Negro workman in the railroad yard could not resist the alluring rhythmic appeal of the shifting engine's iron refrain—result, the "Chicka-hanka" song. The dean of a Southern institution who was interested in folk-music sat down on his rock wall hoping to capture *au vol* a certain song he had heard a gang of street laborers sing. He had gotten the tune but was anxious for the words. The song leader evidently divined his intention, and the dean to his dismay heard the following:

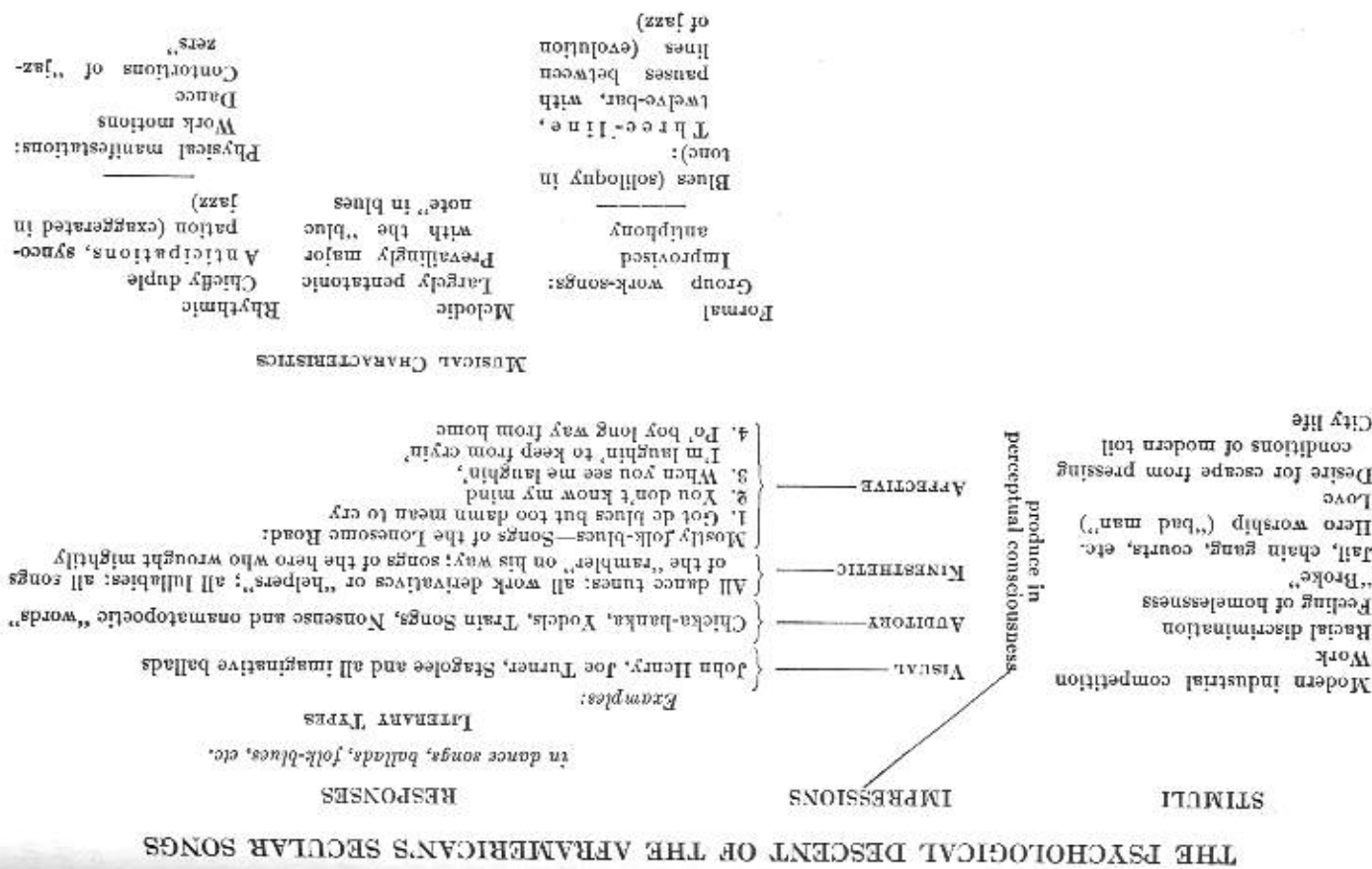
"White man settin' on wall,
White man settin' on wall,
White man settin' on wall all day long,
Wastin' his time, wastin' his time."

Although the Negro's songs are reflective of his new environment, the scarcity of the direct references to slavery in the earlier songs is on first thought striking. A few of the most obvious of such references are to be found in songs like: Run, Nigger, Run; Run, Mary, Run; Run to Jesus; Many Thousands Go; Done Wid Driber's Dribin'; Mother, is Massa Gwine Sell Us?; Oh, Freedom; Holy Bible (refrain); Slavery Chain. Yet where this institution could call upon the armed forces of a sanctioning state to guarantee its maintenance if threatened, the discretion of submitting was obviously the better part of valor for a subject, defenseless, leaderless people, even though they had been inclined to revolt. Where it was desired to voice dissatisfaction with existing conditions, recourse was had to the double meaning, as in Hebrew apocalyptic. In many cases, too, the masters were kind, and the slaves not ill-content with their lot. And to those born into the condition it must have seemed a thing inevitable, even with all its hardships. Yet the "sorrow songs" betray more eloquently and poignantly than direct references could ever do a condition, and their authors' estimate of a condition, that assuredly was not theirs as a matter of choice. In the words of Mr. Barton, "Some of the old slave songs survive which had in them the bitterness of a sorrow that never spoke its intensity in plain words, but sought figures from the Bible or veiled its real meaning in inarticulate moans or songs of grief that never uttered the real nature of the sorrow."

Finally, the approach of the war and its progress, for reasons best known to the slave himself, gave rise to an unprecedented interest in a militant type of Christianity, and he sings now of the valiant soldier, of the heaven-born soldier (or reborn soldier), of the soldier of the cross, of the army (of the Lord), of warfare or the Gospel war, of marching in the field, of Captain Jesus, the roll-call, of Dis-a Union and the Union band, about enlistments and commissions, Satan's camp, of freedom, men of war, etc. And once more the antiphonal form proved itself to be an apt and valuable social agency for the Negro, as again his perceptual consciousness caused him to vocalize his life occasionally, improvisationally, and communally.

e. The Secular Songs of the Negro

As regards the secular music of the Negro, I must be content to refer the reader to the literature which has appeared as a result of the newly awakened interest in this field. Of significance in this connection is the work of Mrs. Burlin, Professor Talley, Miss Scarborough, Professors Odum and Johnson, Mr. W. C. Handy, Mr. Abbe Niles, Mr. J. A. Rogers, and the Messrs. J. W. and J. R. Johnson. The Negro's trueness to the perceptual type makes it possible to present a companion chart to the one on the spirituals, showing the psychological descent of the secular songs. Inasmuch as the religious songs were used on many occasions, and reel, fiddle, devil, corn tunes and breakdowns were frowned out of court by church members, and also because attention early centered upon the preservation only of the religious songs, the number of the surviving secular songs is relatively small, although if account be taken of those "mushroom" songs which were forgotten with the passing of the occasions that inspired them, a considerable body of these must have been brought into existence. Scattered examples are to be found in some of the earlier collections, as in "Slave Songs," but only recently has an effort been made to preserve what could be salvaged from limbo. Some of the more modern of these secular songs, however, cannot be held to be as widely representative of the black race in America as were the spirituals, preceding as they do from the lower and more vicious circles of the colored population. This, of course, neither detracts from their interest nor impairs their sociological value.



As in the case of the spiritual, so here there is a mixing and blending of types which lend attractiveness to the songs. But the folk-blues lie mostly in the realm of the affective—the quasi-outcast desires nothing so much as sympathy.

As for jazz, the Negro may if he wishes claim the questionable distinction of being its originator. I have elsewhere¹ delivered myself at length upon this "tonic for the strong and poison for the weak," and hence refrain from further elaboration here. That American music should have influenced European composers at all should presumably cause us to expand our national chest; and in apportioning "credit" the Aframerican must, of course, receive whatever is his due. Whether this "influence" concerns itself with anything more than experimentation, or will help to bring concreteness out of the prevailing discretism in modern music is to be doubted. Musically the superiority of the spirituals to jazz shows itself in the more interesting and more varied form and superior rhythmic vitality of the former, in a more unified and coherent melody; and as for poetic and spiritual content—comparisons are odious. There is this, however, to be said for Negro jazz, that had it remained solely a black art, had it not suffered the Jewish (Semitic!) direption, it would probably have developed its own independent melody, rather than have become a parasitic mannerism preying upon the classics, and a musical nondescript. The spirituals by a religious alchemy often transfused the baser metal of Methodist and Baptist camp-meeting tunes into pure gold. By its treatment of the classics and all good tunes, jazz debases their nobler coinage, sometimes even that of the spirituals. Then too, the rhythms which informed the early Negro jazz before it was caught up, commercialized, and transformed into a dull, mechanized, deterministic dis-music did likewise own a superior vitality and a human appeal of which the latter is devoid.

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II. THE CONSERVATION OF RACE VALUES IN AFRAMERICAN MUSIC

I close the discussion of African traits and their American developments not because it is finished—many essential phases of the subject, both religious and musical, remain untouched, notably a treatment of rhythmic and melodic peculiarities—but because

¹THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY, October, 1929, "Jazz—Debit and Credit"

it is perhaps better to refrain entirely from broaching certain matters which, if they are to be discussed at all, should be accorded more adequate consideration than is possible in a brief essay. The two charts may give a partial clue to the extent of the field to be covered. Yet sufficient has perhaps been said or suggested to make it clear that the African's experience in America, despite hardships and vicissitudes, has been accompanied by at least some compensatory musical and religious gains alike for himself and for the white man. Both, for example, prize the spirituals highly, although both recognize, too, that they were bought at a tremendous price. It seems to be one of the hard sayings of existence that to produce the lily there must be the muck, that it had to be Nazareth out of which Jesus should come, that it required impoverished, czarist Russia to yield her golden folk-songs, almost submerged Finland her "Finlandia," and that bondage should be the condition of the spiritual. And as though still further to emphasize this paradox, it is not to-day the prosperous Negroes who have continued to produce folk-tunes, but the near-penniless, the vagrant, those in "hard luck." Out of such untoward conditions and as an escape therefrom have come those secular counterparts of the older spirituals, a product of the same urge to musicalize life—the folk-blues.

This recognition of the sweet uses of adversity (the "use" for the time, of course, is always bitter) seems to have been a poetic divination of the newer scientific doctrine that natural tendencies and desires thwarted in their satisfaction in one direction will find a compensatory outlet in another. It remains now to inquire into the significance for the spiritual future of the Negro of the removal of these bitter-sweet inhibitions. Will it mean that he buys his economic independence at the expense of his folk-creative urge? Is it true, as Professor W. H. Thomas suggests, that "property-owning Negroes do not sing"? Does preoccupation with the absorbing task of earning a living under modern competitive and industrial conditions leave him neither time nor inclination to "sing his flowing consciousness into song"? If so, then the new status also is bought at a high price, and the Negro may have cause to deplore the loss of his birthright in the hard bargain. Herein is a tragic sense of life, if it be not possible to have both of these desirables. Is it also true that one cannot serve Apollo and Mammon? Add to this a growing sophistication (in the more distasteful acceptance of the term) which the Negro learns from the white man, and which is partly the result of the scientific invasion, an increasing self-consciousness (the

antithesis of that creative unselfconsciousness which produced the spirituals), and a patronizing attitude toward his own immediate past, and the tragic sense is deepened. Nor is it necessary to mention the generally pernicious influence in this respect of the piano-player, the phonograph, and the radio.

May we thus have the New Negro, but not that consciousness which instantaneously reacted to various life situations with a lilting refrain, a vivid word-picture, a deep expression of religious sentiment? Says Mr. J. W. Johnson: "With the close of the creative period of the Blues, which appears to be at hand, it is probable that the whole folk-creative effort of the Negro in the United States will have come to an end." The New Negro's assured sense of racial competence and his pride of race, which his awakening to the value and beauty of the spirituals has helped to beget, are his by right. But so is the Negro's perceptual consciousness and its acceptable spontaneous productivity. Consciously to effect a union of the niceties of Occidental art with such creative abandon were a consummation devoutly to be wished. Certainly one of the greatest contributions which Negro genius can offer to Western culture is that of its perceptual consciousness with its elemental vigor, its irresponsible gaiety, its *joie de vivre*, its uncritical spontaneity that enjoys rather than asks to that intellectual sterility, that sense of mental and physical strain, weariness and boredom, that diseased conceptualism which has sickled o'er so much of our spiritual output with the pale cast of thought. To expect that the Negro, under the hard modern conditions which the white man has laid upon him, should nevertheless be able to make such a contribution, should develop only his own virtues and remain utterly untouched by the white man's vices, may be to expect too much. Yet it is a sign of hope that the New Negro seems to have come to a conscious appreciation of this ancient racial inheritance of his, and has set himself to make a deliberate choice of those elements of the white man's civilization which he will cultivate along with the former. If Mr. Alain Locke is correct in believing that the New Negro does 'have this ancient key which we thought culture had lost,' and if such a conscious blending is possible, then after the various 'preluding experiments from Dvořák to Goldmark, including the borrowing of rhythmical suggestions by Milhaud and Stravinsky, experiments which have proclaimed the value of the Negro musical idioms, but have not fully developed them,' one may expect unprecedented musical productions from the New Negro.

a. *The Outlook for Negro Music*

Undoubtedly, the musical future of the Negro rests in his own hands. Invaluable as have been his contributions by way of thematic and idiomatic material to the music of America, the "working up" of such material by white composers into various art-forms frequently results in an artificial type of product, with content and rhythm highly unwhite, and extended complex development and instrumentation (if orchestral) highly unblack. One can scarcely escape receiving from even the best of such compositions an impression of dogged deliberateness on the part of the composer: "Go to, now; I *will* work up this and that theme." Perhaps the works of Mr. John Powell in this genre are least open to such criticism. He seems so well to apprehend the Negro genius as to have accomplished on the part of a white man that desirable blend just referred to, and his works therefore reveal an unusual unity in compositions of this type.

But no more will the Negro best serve the future of his own music by merely quarrying the spirituals or folk-blues already created and rendering the precious ore into divers shapes and forms. Satisfaction with such a condition would indicate that a period of crystallization had been reached. When, in the course of musical or religious evolution, men's chief interest centers in analysis, classification, systematization, exposition, and charting (as in the present essay!) of past achievements, it heralds the approach of creative impotence, and the result in music is arrangements, transcriptions, adaptations, etc.; in religion, theology, dogma and the higher criticism—the self-conscious, cooling-off stage has arrived.

Besides, we are coming to realize that folk-music is sufficient unto itself. It is its own justification. Its concise brevity is the soul of its wit. Its message is made none the more impressive by a technical or instrumental over-elaboration in which indeed its savor is often lost and the song itself utterly disappears. (*Taste* Lewis Carroll's delicious quip, "Tema con Variazioni".) Its inherent completeness often baffles the "worker-up," who, lacking inspiration of his own, has turned hither. To be sure, airs with variations may give the composer an opportunity to exhibit his wares (for example, Beethoven and Brahms in their pianoforte variations), but not always do they rank among the outstanding works of his creative genius. For these he usually seeks original themes. The really great musical works built upon or around folk-themes directly transplanted to them are relatively few in number. There

is probably ample ground for arranging the spirituals as solos and decking them out with modern harmonic furbelows. Provided such exceptional religious artists as Mr. Hayes or Mr. Robeson perform them, they convey a message to many who otherwise would have no means of becoming acquainted with the spirituals. But the spirituals were "composed" to be sung *a cappella* by a group, and at least one individual being accustomed to hearing them so sung, will never be content with hearing them produced in any other way.

If the desideratum be that the New Negro "carry on" consciously with an increased artistic sensibility in the same manner as did the spiritual-makers of old without this sensibility, then it would seem to be of the utmost importance that the Negro by all means possible conserve that which won for him the sobriquet, "the singing voice of America": his tendency to think aloud in song, to turn life itself into music; that he keep his vocal-mindedness as a pearl of great price; that he forsake not the ancient custom of making music occasionally, improvisationally, communally. In at least one prominent instance he has retained his habit of improvisation. It is the same trait which reveals itself in both the ejaculatory "Hallelujah's," "O Lord's," "Amen's," etc., interjected into the spirituals, and in the jazz "breaks" which grew out of a desire to fill in the long pauses between the lines of the blues with various comments. But to say that therefore the former is the predecessor of the latter is not quite accurate; it is merely a product of the same tendency.

Whether this folk-creative urge be capable of deliberate cultivation, even though we knew the proper technique to this end, is, of course, problematic. The wind of the creative spirit seems to laugh to scorn the puny efforts of psychologists to diagram its course and shackle it to their will. We can never again look for a new outburst of spiritual-making. The "favoring" conditions which produced these songs are gone forever. But in the case of the Negro, we see a raw genius transplanted to a foreign soil by an intuitive choice appropriating from its new environment precisely those religious, literary, linguistic and musical elements that it liked, and out of them creating its own distinctive idioms, welding them all into the unity known as the spiritual. May we not then in the course of the years expect that, under new conditions—some more, some less favorable to the production of song—this same genius will exercise again the same selective process, and upon the same basis of its perceptual consciousness produce a second distinctive type or a number of types? Indeed, in the

folk-blues it has already given us such a type. Other types may perhaps be recognized in the piano pieces and in certain choral numbers of Mr. Dett, and in the violin pieces of Mr. C. C. White. And in view of the Negro's vocal-mindedness, his vocal and harmonic (not polyphonic) gifts, it may not be unreasonable to expect, as Mr. Locke suggests, that the most fruitful development of his peculiar talents may be along choral rather than along instrumental lines.

b. *The Betrayal of a Racial Trust*

One factor in the Negro's make-up constitutes at once a menace and a promise. This is his many-sided susceptibility. But the spirituals prove that the Negro's impressionability, in the face of as much of the white man's culture as that to which he was exposed, did not allow him merely to imitate the latter's religious songs. His strong individualism caused him to pass all—religion, poetry, language, music—through the crucible of his perceptual consciousness, whence emerged a product bearing the unmistakable marks of the Negro genius in the way of form, rhythm, sound and imagery, fused together with Western melody, language and religious content. Here uncanny intuition alone accomplished a thing which should serve as an object-lesson for further conscious endeavor. Certainly the way of musical progress for the Negro lies no more to-day along the line of attempted reproductions of the creations of the whites than in the past. Such efforts will neither impress the whites, nor prove ultimately satisfying to the blacks. If the Negro is wise, he will avoid nothing so much as a colorless eclecticism, whether it be in music or elsewhere.

The wider field of music yields at least one illuminating illustration of the results of betrayal of a racial trust which may be pertinent here. It is, of course, an unfortunate situation anywhere which makes it possible for a conflict to arise within the creative artist between the desire to express one's own individual or racial self and the desire to convince oneself and others that one possesses traits generally esteemed among an envying people of a race different from one's own. Yet there should be no doubt as to the most profitable course suggested by experience for such a situation. The Negro is not exempted from that usage of experience which requires fidelity to one's own highest and best as the first condition of his self-realization. In the words of Dr. Mason, summarizing Mr. Paul Rosenfeld in the latter's "Musical Portraits," "Just as the highest achievement in art is attained through

a 'sublimation' that is racial as well as personal, so the deepest defeat, the most complete sterility, is that which avenges a suppression not only of personal but of racial instincts." The New Negro's pride of race should act as a wholesome corrective against the appearance of that conflict between "the desire of self-expression and the fear of self-revelation" which caused Mahler, the Jew, in Austria, to develop "an eclectic, featureless style, devoid of true individuality and real power," a type of Jew who "through the superficial assimilation of the traits of the people among whom he was condemned to live, and through the suppression of his own nature, became sterile." One's hope for the Aframerican is that it may be with him as with Mr. Ernest Bloch, also a Jew, but one who, according to Mr. Rosenfeld, has the "intelligence, sense of reality, real overwhelming spiritual strength," that Mahler lacked, and in whose music is found "a large, a poignant, an authentic expression of what is racial in the Jew. There is music of his that is authentic by virtue of qualities more fundamentally racial than the synagogical modes on which it bases itself, the Semitic pomp and color that informs it." So may the Aframerican, too, break up the fountains of his great deep, study to know himself, to feel, to reveal, to develop himself as he really and racially is, so far as this is consistent with life in such a modern democracy as this of which he finds himself a part. Wrote Robert Schumann, at twenty-nine, to his future wife: "I want to be ten times less than other people, and only be worth something to myself." This is at once enlightened selfishness and the higher altruism.

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In the first section I have referred briefly to certain fundamental similarities between African religion on the one hand, and Judaism and a Jewish type of Christianity on the other, in virtue of which the Negro in America was enabled to realize some of his own higher potentialities. It is necessary to repeat that, without his religion, without the sustaining examples of the enslaved and released Jews, both as a nation and as individuals into whose situations he vicariously inserted himself, without the promises of Christianity, the spirituals could never have been. His religious faith alone made the spirituals great. It furnished that elusive undertone not heard with physical ears, but which tugs at the heart-strings and softens the spirits of the obdurate. This is the real secret of the spirituals' appeal, their pledges of

immortality. The music, the imagery, the form, the language, were all secondary to the fact that the slave, even in his trying situation, had something great to sing about. They were all "things added unto" deeply felt religious experiences. Jazz and the blues reveal the bankruptcy of the Negro's music divorced as they are from religion.

Doubtless the religion of the New Negro will assume different forms from that of his ancestors who created the spirituals (and the unwisdom of a colorless eclecticism is as apparent here as in the case of music, if the danger is not even more real). Assuredly the need of a sustaining faith under the trying conditions of the present is no less to-day than formerly. Here, too, one is concerned to know whether the Aframerican will barter his keen religious susceptibilities for a mess of prosperity. So to do will be to wrong himself, his music and his nation. With a few outstanding exceptions, such as the works of Sibelius and Bloch, modern music is suffering from spiritual anemia. We are prepared to speak magniloquently, but we have no great things to say. This is as true of Stravinsky and that pathetic little-bo-peep-ism of the day—the neo-primitive movement—as it is of jazz. In the past the Negro depended upon his religion to "keep him from sinking down," and he spoke greater than he knew. Perhaps more than he realizes it, is the Negro's future, musical and otherwise, linked up with that of his religion.