



The Spirituals and the Blues

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Cone explores two classic aspects of African-American culture--the spirituals and the blues. He tells the captivating story of how slaves and the children of slaves used this music to affirm their essential humanity in the face of oppression. The blues are shown to be a "this-worldly" expression of cultural and political rebellion. The spirituals tell about the "attempt to carve out a significant existence in a very trying situation."

The Spirituals and the Blues Details

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From Reader Review The Spirituals and the Blues for online ebook

Charles says

A nice discourse on the roots of the spirituals and the blues. More of a theological discourse. Art as an expression of suffering... yet also a healing within that suffering. Paradoxical... Cone does a nice job of explaining it.

Leena says

Extremely eye-opening concerning the history and theology behind the music of black slaves and blacks living through segregation and beyond. I will experience this music with new open eyes and heart. Realized I've sung many a slave spiritual as a white child and adult in my church experience and the meaning for me has been much different than the intended purpose of those who originally created and sang them.

Theon Hill says

Cone offers an excellent analysis of the theological, historical, and social roots of spirituals and the blues. While I disagree with certain tenets of Cone's liberation theology, his perspective gives him keen insight into the vital role that these forms of music played in African American cultural life as people of color have sought to maintain their humanity against the backdrop of America's vicious legacy of White Supremacy.

Izaiah Dawkins says

Dr.Cone is a master at making a clear connection between pain and music. If you understand that the best music,that transcends time ,comes from pain. Loved the book.

Michael says

"The power of song in the struggle for black survival--that is what the spirituals and blues are about."

One of the best books on the subject of the spirituals and the blues and their relation to the soul. Highly recommended.

Sean-david says

While I am not in agreement with liberation theology as a systematic theology, Cone offers some excellent, important, and truthful observations about the theolgy preached through the spirituals. Additionally, Cone

makes some important observations about the blues and the blues musician/singer being a prophetic voice of the community in the truth telling sense of the word.

Wesley says

This was definitely my favorite Cone book for two reasons.

First, I think he elaborates more on what eschatological hope means in his theology. It's a topic that comes up frequently in his writing and it was good to hear some elaboration.

Second, Cone virtually articulates certain aspects of Christus Victor atonement theory VERY clearly. For this reason, I find his theology a bit more tenable because it can be connected to Orthodox Christianity (Christus Victor being the main atonement theory until Anselm).

Overall, a great read.

Jason Gordon says

I have to say that this book is wonderfully written. Dr. Cone is quite at home talking about Christianity in the African American community. Christianity in the African American community shares the same iconography as the Christianity of whites, but the iconography in the former community is interpreted differently in so far as these icons are imbued with African traditions. Dr. Cone uses the spirituals to provide a cogent reading/interpretation of African American/Black Christianity and there were quite a few gems that made this book worth reading. For example, the experience of suffering was not used by the African American community to question the justice and righteousness of God. That was a given. The experience of suffering was used to articulate communal concerns 'centered on the faithfulness of the community of believers in a world full of trouble.'

However, while the interpretation of the spirituals is quite excellent, I was disappointed that the blues got one chapter, a chapter that felt rushed. I do hope the author does an expanded/revised edition, but all in all I'd highly recommend it.

Joe T. says

This was a great book. I would like to see similar treatment given to rap music.

Michael Doerr says

The language of music and the liberation struggle

Raully says

Thought-provoking, but this examination is little more than the tip of an iceberg.

Josh says

Short, but a very intriguing overview and theological analysis of the spirituals and the blues. My primary problem with it, especially having read Cone's more systematic works, is that it at times he seems to be finding his own theology in the theology of the spirituals and not doing justice to places where his views would be inconsistent with those of the spirituals he cites..

SooHo Lee says

Easily one of the most beautiful theological works that analyzes the black spirit in and through the spirituals and the blues. These musical outlets are more than ascetic get-aways under oppressive regimes, rather they embody the rhythmic sways and suaves of black hope and grit. Grounded in real history, the spirituals and the blues expose, reject, and recapitulate supremacists' definition of black nothingness/nobodiness into black somebodiness. For blacks, music is their authoritative medium for reshaping their narrative towards a redemptive and majestic eschatological hope: "My Lord! Po' mourner's got a home at las'. Mourner's got a home at las'."

cf. www.sooholee.wordpress.com

Sandy H says

Read for a class. I really liked the theory and enjoyed reading it for awhile, but eventually it began to feel as if the book would have made a better article. By halfway through, I felt like I'd gotten the majority of the argument and much felt redundant after that. Still, important work and very interesting.

Mauberley says

This is the first book of James Cone's that I have read and I am confident that it won't be the last. I found this to be a fascinating exploration of the meaning/ significance/ power of Black spirituals. For this reader, it was also a sound introduction to the work of James Cone the theologian. As Cone remarks, '...[I]t is through the strength of their hope in God that the oppressed are saved (Romans 8:24). It was this transcendent element of hope (as expressed in black music) which elevated black people above the limitations of the slave experience, and enabled them to view black humanity independently of their oppressors...Heaven was a vision of a new Black Humanity.' (page 90, from the chapter entitled, 'The Meaning of Heaven in Black Spirituals') After spending time this year reading work by Moltmann, Cone offers a an excellent example of 'political theology'. Some may feel that the chapter on the blues is simply too short and I cannot argue with that. I would add that Cone appears reluctant to challenge or explore the deep streak of sexism that makes

many blues lyrics unpleasant to hear.

I recommend this to anyone at all interested in any area that I have touched upon in the preceding summary.

Cone writes a clear and thoughtful prose infused with a righteous love and anger.
