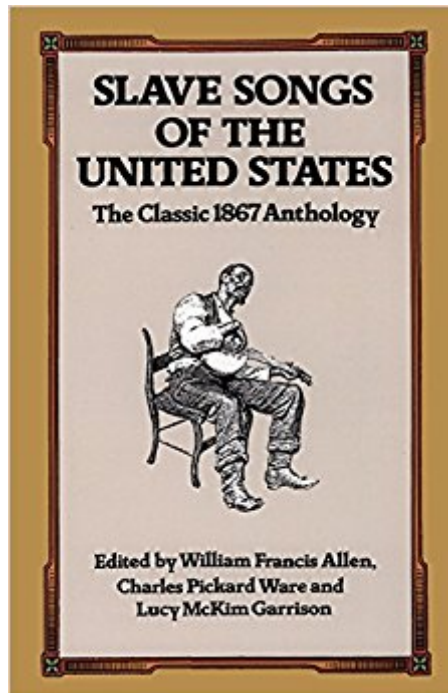


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Slave Songs Of The United States: The Classic 1867 Anthology



Synopsis

First published in 1867, this landmark book represented the first systematic effort to collect and preserve the songs sung by the plantation slaves of the Old South. To ensure authenticity, the editors notated most of the melodies and words directly from the singers themselves. The result was a rare musical treasury containing complete music and lyrics for over 130 songs, arranged by geographical region. Among them are: Roll, Jordan, Roll; Jehovah, Hallelujah; I hear from Heaven to-day; Michael, row the boat ashore; Turn sinner, turn O; Nobody knows the trouble I've had; No Man can hinder me; Heave away; Charleston Gals; I'm gwine to Alabamy; I want to die like-a Lazarus die; Belle Layotte; On to Glory Jacob's Ladder; My Father, how long?; Musieu Bainjo; Lean on the Lord's side; God got plenty o' room. The book presents the melody line and all the known verses to each song. The editors also include directions for singing, along with a commentary on each song's history, its possible variations, what some of its key references mean and other pertinent details. A new preface to the Dover edition by Harold Courlander appraises the book's importance in American musical and cultural history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book gives great insight in to the true meaning of African American slaves songs. This book also discusses the origin and uses of the songs and provides footnotes for most of the colloquials and variations in dialect for each song.

There are 136 songs in this book, most of which are no longer sung. They are simply amazing, musically and theologically. An example: "Come and Go With Me", collected in Augusta, GA, presents a major scale with a flat 6th and 7th, and the tune ends on the 4th. Unfortunately, the collectors, as went on for generations as standard procedure, did not acknowledge the names of any of their sources. The original "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" is in here; it is a rowing song from the sea islands, addressed to the archangel Michael as a prayer for safe passage; these lyrics are more striking than the familiar ones. Here are the complete lyrics to "Come and Go With Me", which is singular both in its scale and its notion that heaven is in the present, to be accepted rather than earned:

Ole Satan is a busy ole man
 He roll stones in my way
 Master Jesus is my bosom friend
 He roll 'em out my way
 Oh, come and go with me
 Oh, come and go with me
 Oh, come and go with me
 A-walking in the heaven I roam
 I did not come here myself my Lord
 It was my Lord who brought me here
 And I really do believe I'm a child of God
 A-walking in the heaven I roam
 Oh, come and go with me
 Oh, come and go with me
 Oh, come and go with me
 A-walking in the heaven I roam
 It was reported that the freed slaves did not want to remember their old songs. And we all have reasons for forgetting a painful past. But look at these songs; they are the heart and soul's truth of life. It is not too late to learn from these people. Put this music in your heart.

Water spring that never dry, Hallelu,
 Hallelu
 The more we dig, the more it spring, Hallelujah!

No doubt about it, this is an essential book in the field of American music history, black music history, ethnomusicology, etc. However, one would do better to buy the 1995 Dover edition--the reprinting is much clearer and legible, and the paper stock is smoother. And the price is the same, plus you get a preface (undated) by Harold Courlander. Sorry, this Applegate printing is just not as good.

Those who love spirituals often find the origins of spirituals in general to be elusive, if not impossible to track with any degree of reliability. Though this collection of spirituals is quite limited in terms of being highly localized (versus attempting to comprehend all of the spirituals of all of the South), it covers many of the best-loved Negro spirituals. Published first in 1867, it provides perhaps the strongest link for the largest grouping of spirituals, contemporaneous (or nearly so) with the music it attempts to capture. For those who love the Negro spiritual, this is a 'must have' for your collection.

My high school sophomore English students read Julius Lester's book "To Be a Slave" as a foundation for understanding the slave experience in the United States, particularly during the final

decades leading up to the Civil War. To further their immersion into the slave culture, I have also purchased numerous slave narratives and other reference materials, including this book: "Slave Songs of the United States," first published in 1867. This collection begins with a 28-page introduction from editor William Francis Allen (1830-1889). In it, he writes: "More than thirty years ago those plantation songs made their appearance which were so extraordinarily popular for a while; and if "Coal-Black Rose," "Zip Coon" and "Ole Virginny nebber tire" have been succeeded by spurious imitations, manufactured to suit the somewhat sentimental taste of our community, the fact that these were called "negro melodies" was itself a tribute to the musical genius of the race." And this collection of 136 songs is, indeed, a tribute to the musical heritage of African-Americans. The collection is divided into four sections: I. Southeastern Slave States (82 songs), II. Northern Seaboard Slave States (20 songs), III. Inland Slave States (9 songs), and IV. Slave Songs of the United States (25 songs). Each song includes music and lyrics, as well as occasional notes of the songs history, origin, lyric meaning and/or use. It would be simply amazing to actually hear these songs as they were originally sung, but having the music and knowing these were songs that helped sustain an enslaved people gives me chills. These songs tell their own story, and it is a fascinating read. VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Look for the Dover reprint Slave Songs of the United States: The Classic 1867 Anthology for a better quality printing at a lower price. This publication in 1867 is, if I recall correctly, the earliest publication of African American spirituals in book form. It did not have the lasting influence of the pivotal The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs (Dover Song Collections) published a few years later, but this book is absolutely indispensable to anyone interested in the subject. The book is available free online with some searching but this inexpensive reprint is an easy read and easy to consult.

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