By B. Lee Cooper

The Image of the Black Man: Contemporary Lyrics as Oral History*

> The songwriter has a special place . . . , for at his best he verbalizes the state of society, either directly by openly questioning or protesting things, or indirectly by depicting the private life and interior feelings of someone who moves within that society.
>
> Jack McDonough[1]

> Black Music has been the vanguard reflection of black feeling and the continuous repository of black consciousness.
>
> Ron Wellburn[2]

> Everybody wants to know why I sing the blues . . . Well, I've been around a long time, I really have paid my dues.
>
> B. B. King[3]

I. ORAL RESOURCES FOR EXAMINING BLACK HISTORY

The ability of a teacher to stimulate reflection on issues of significance to young blacks is clearly dependent upon his or her skill in identifying universal concerns among members of the Afro-American community. One instructional resource that can help a history instructor accomplish this goal is popular music. Traditionally, the lyrics of black singers have rarely been introduced in classrooms. Why is this true? I contend that the standard scholarly process of assembling historical evidence on the Negro past has created a variety of unforeseen difficulties for classroom teachers. The tendency of academicians, particularly historians, to rely solely upon written sources—newspaper articles and editorials, official records from state legislatures and both Houses of Congress, books and essays by abolitionists, slaves, politicians, and ministers, as well as other standard literary resources—has rendered black history "speechless." In only a few instances has the rich oral tradition of the black man even been considered, let alone thoroughly investigated, by American historians.[4] The following pages will illustrate some alternative instructional approaches which should be employed more accurately to portray the concerns of Afro-Americans and to translate contemporary black history into a more dynamic teaching/learning process.

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*This essay is adapted from a paper originally presented on December 28, 1977 at the 92nd Annual Convention of the American Historical Association, Dallas, Texas. Dr. Cooper is Professor of History, Newberry College, Newberry, South Carolina.

[1] "Review Essay on Jackson Browne," *Popular Music and Society,* IV (1975), pp. 242-243.

[2] "The Black Aesthetic Imperative," in *The Black Aesthetic,* edited by Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), p. 126.

[3] From the song "Why I Sing The Blues" which appears in *The Poetry of Soul,* edited by A. X. Nicholas (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), p. 43.

[4] Russell Ames, "Implications of Negro Folk Songs," *Science and Society,* XV (Spring 1951), pp. 163-173; Michael Haralambos, "Soul Music and Blues: Their Meaning and Relevance in Northern United States Black Ghettos," in *Afro-American*

Although there is no universal agreement among historians on the specific reasons for teaching black history, the following list of objectives seems broad enough to encompass most instructional efforts:

A. To demonstrate the social, economic, and political difficulties encountered by racial minorities in contemporary American society.

B. To eradicate numerous myths and stereotype-based misunderstandings which continually surface among blacks and whites.

C. To examine the historical context of ideas, issues, and problems which have direct bearing on the identity of Afro-American students.

D. To establish a logical basis for securing constructive social and political reforms in comtemporary society.

These objectives address several essential personal elements for stimulating student interest. They aim at defining identity/self-image; they emphasize functional reality along with the necessity for promoting change in thought *and* action; and they involve the pursuit of historical truth.

Without appropriate instructional resources, though, even the best educational objectives are worthless. The significance of the oral tradition in the Afro-American heritage has been frequently expressed and thoroughly documented.[5] For more than three centuries the black culture in America has dramatically chronicled its ideas, attitudes, and

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Anthropology, edited by Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 367-384; David Evans, "From Contributors—Afro-American Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore,* LXXXVI (October/December 1973), pp. 413-434; Eileen Southern, "An Origin For The Negro Spiritual," *The Black Scholar,* III (Summer 1972), pp. 8-13; Samuel Charters, *The Legacy of the Blues: Art and Lives of Twelve Great Bluesmen* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1975); Gerald W. Haslam, *Afro-American Oral Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Ian Hoare, "Mighty, Mighty, Spade and Whitey: Black Lyrics and Soul's Interaction With White Culture," in *The Soul Book,* edited Ian Hoare, Tony Cummings, Clive Anderson, and Simon Frith (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 146-210; Harry Oster (comp.), *Living Country Blues* (New York: Minerva Press, 1975); Gordon Stevenson, "Race Records: Victims of Benign Neglect in Libraries," *Wilson Library Bulletin,* L (November 1975), pp. 224-232; Irene V. Jackson-Brown, "Afro-American Song in the Nineteenth Century: A Neglected Source," *Black Perspective in Music,* IV (April 1976), pp. 22-38; John P. Morgan and Thomas C. Tulloss, "The Jake Walk Blues: A Toxicologic Tragedy Mirrored in American Popular Song," *The Annals of Internal Medicine,* LXXXV (December 1976), pp. 804-808; and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[5] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958) pp. 261-291; LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), pp. 1-10, 17-49; Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 30-49; Paul Oliver, *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 3-24; Ortiz M. Walton, "A Comparative Analysis of the African and Western Aesthetics," in *The Black Aesthetic,* edited by Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1972), pp. 154-164; Eklin T. Sithole, "Black Folk Music," in *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America,* edited by Thomas Kochman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 65-82; and J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "The Musical Heritage of Africa," in *Slavery, Colonialism, and Racism,* edited by Sidney W. Mintz (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 151-161; and John F. Szwed, "Afro-American Musical Adaptation," in *Afro-American Anthropology,* edited by Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 219-228.

events in ballad form. Still most educators continue to rely solely upon written texts which deaden the minstrel's emotional appeal and dull the spiritual force of his message. The lyrics of artists such as Isaac Hayes, B. B. King, Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson, Roberta Flack, Ray Charles, and Diana Ross, which provide significant insights into the past, present, and future of black America, must be utilized to help foster a "living classroom." Yet at a time when historians and teachers of history are more actively utilizing the commentaries of previously "neglected voices"—women, minorities, politically powerless people—to enrich perspectives on the American past, they continue to overlook the significant contributions of females, blacks, and other musical artists in the rich oral Afro-American tradition. It is even more difficult to understand why most serious scholars of black history have ignored the dramatic emergence of popular music as a major business enterprise,[6] as a

[6] For discussions of the most significant black recording companies see and hear the following: ATLANTIC—Charlie Gillett, *Making Tracks: Atlantic Records and the Growth of a Multi-Billion-Dollar Industry* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1974); "Ahmet Ertegun Interview" and "Jerry Wexler Interview" in *The Rockin' '50's: The Decade That Transformed the Pop Music Scene,* written by Arnold Shaw (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974), pp. 78-79, 83-86; *History of Rhythm and Blues, 1947-1967* (SD 8161-4/8193-4/8208-9)—8 volumes (New York: Atlantic Recording Company, 1968 (Vols. I-VI) and 1969 (Vols. VII-VIII); and *The Super Hits* (SD 501/8188/8203/8224/8274)—5 volumes (New York: Atlantic Recording Company, 1967 (Vol. I), 1968 (Vols. II-III), and 1970 (Vols. IV-V); CHESS—Peter Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock and Roll* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstirey, 1971), pp. 180-202; *Pop Origins* (Chess 1544)—one volume (Chicago: Chess Records, n.d.); Willie Dixon, *I Am the Blues* (CS 9987)—one volume (New York: Columbia Records/CBS, Inc., n.d.); Howlin' Wolf, *Chester Burnett Aka Howlin' Wolf*—one volume, 2 records (New York: Chess/Janus Records, 1972); The Moonglows, *Moonglows: Chess Rock 'N' Rhythm Series*—one volume (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Chess Records, 1976); and Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield), *Folk Singer* (Chess 1483)—one volume (Chicago: Chess Recording Corporation, n.d.); MOTOWN—Simon Frith, "You Can Make It If You Try: The Motown Story," in *The Soul Book,* edited by Ian Hoare, Tony Cummings, Clive Anderson, and Simon Frith (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 39-73; Jon Landau, "Motown: The First Ten Years," in *It's Too Late To Stop Now: A Rock and Roll Journal* (San Francisco, California: Straight Arrow Press, 1972), pp. 143-150; Rochelle Larkin, "Tales of Two Cities: Memphis and Motown," in *Soul Music!* (New York: Lancer Books, Inc., 1970), pp. 77-79; Joe McEwen and Jim Miller, "Motown," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 222-233; David Morse, *Motown and the Arrival of Black Music* (New York: Collier Books, 1971); Earl Paige *et al.,* "Diana: A Billboard Special Supplement," *Billboard,* (March 20, 1976), 72 pp.; Arnold Shaw, "Motown: The Detroit Sound," in *The World of Soul* (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), pp. 202-218; *Motown's Preferred Stock* (MG 881/2/3 SI)—3 volumes (Hollywood, California: Motown Record Corporation, 1977); Diana Ross and The Supremes, *Diana Ross and the Supremes Anthology* (M7 794 A3)—one volume, 2 records (Hollywood, California: Motown Record Corporation, 1794); Stevie Wonder, Greatest Hits (T 282/T6 313 S1)—two volumes (Detroit, Michigan: Tamla Records, 1968 and 1971); SAVOY—*The Roots of Rock 'N' Roll* (SJL 2221)—one volume, two records (New York: Artista Records, Inc., 1977); SPECIALITY—*This Is How It All Began: The Roots of Rock 'N' Roll As Recorded From 1945 To 1955 On Specialty Records* (SPS 2117/8)—two volumes, four records (Hollywood, California: Specialty Records, Inc., 1969 and 1970); STAX—Clive Anderson, "Memphis and the Sounds of the South," in *The Soul Book,* edited by Ian Hoare, Tony Cummings, Clive Anderson, and Simon Frith (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 74-145; Robert Palmer, "The Sound of Memphis," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House , 1976), pp. 202-205; *Wattstax: The Living Word* (STS 2 3010/18)—two volumes, four records (Memphis, Tennessee: Stax Records, Inc., 1972 and 1973).

source of social criticism,[7] and as a means of national and international cultural exchange.[8]

Expanding knowledge in the field of black history has been a primary pursuit of many historical scholars and educators. There is a strange inconsistency, however, in the failure of most contemporary investigators of black history to utilize oral resources in their studies of Afro-American culture. This is not to imply that the most articulate, effective spokesmen among the black populace are not those political leaders, ministers, civil rights advocates, or journalists who utilize standard literary forms of communication. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that black singers and song writers have exerted significant influence on the ideas, attitudes, and values of millions of Americans through the popular music medium. Tunes sung by Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Nina Simone, Wilson Pickett, Stevie Wonder, Lou Rawls, Les McCann, and Marvin Gaye provide substantial oral evidence and social commentary for serious students of contemporary black history.

But were popular recordings among the resources which Allan Nevins was alluding to when he first suggested four decades ago that historians were ignoring valuable non-written sources? Or was "Oral History" designed to be solely a "formal" audio interview vehicle to be applied to prominent public figures rather than a technique designed to capture ideas from an ever-broadening variety of commentators? This essay assumes that the late professor Nevins would contend that historical information must be solicited from the broadest possible spectrum of human sources. Obviously, the study of the Afro-American culture, with its rich and longstanding oral tradition, not only lends itself to but also demands the inclusion of extra-literary commentaries such as those found in popular recordings.

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[7] Russell Ames, "Protest and Irony in Negro Folksong," *Science and Society,* XIV (Summer 1950), pp. 193-213; Samuel Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963); Lloyd Miller and James K. Skipper, Jr., "Sounds of Protest: Jazz and the Militant Avant-Garde," in *Approaches to Deviance: Theories, Concepts, and Research Findings,* edited by Mark Lefton, James K. Skipper, Jr., and Charles H. McCaghy (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1968), pp. 129-140; Phyl Garland, *The Sound of Soul: The History of Black Music* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969), pp. 3-79; Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries Into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Company, 1969); George H. Lewis, "Social Protest and Self Awareness in Black Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society,* II (Summer 1973), pp. 327-333; and Michael Haralambos, *Right On: From Blues To Soul in Black America* (New York: Drake Publishers, Inc., 1975).

[8] Chuck Berry, *The London Church Berry Sessions* (CH 60020)—one volume (New York: Chess/Janus Records, 1972); B. B. King, *B. B. King in London* (ABCX 730)—one volume (Los Angeles, California: ABC Records, Inc., 1971); Les McCann, *Live at Montreaux* (SD2 312)—one volume, two records (New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1973); Les McCann and Eddie Harris, *Swiss Movement* (SD 1537)—one volume (New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1969); and Muddy Waters, *The London Muddy Waters Sessions* (CH 60013)—one volume (New York: Chess/Janus Records, 1972).

II. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF LYRIC RESOURCES

Lyrics created and performed by black artists often carry suggestive autobiographical and sociological overtones. This comment is not meant to imply that every popular recording contains relevant personal or social commentary. Teachers planning to use audio resources must carefully identify specific artists who have significantly affected the ideas and actions of the general public through their musical offerings. Undeniably, the accumulation of reliable historical evidence in the genre of oral/lyrical presentations poses several unique problems. What criteria should be employed to establish a popular music figure's credibility as a historical resource? In response to this question, one might consider areas such as career longevity, the universal applicability of lyrical commentary, the ability of a singer to inspire new trends in performing styles of other artists, and a distinctiveness in the poetic style/musical expression found in specific songs. Though several studies of the lyrical works of Chuck Berry,[9] Ray Charles,[10] and Stevie Wonder[11] have attempted to establish

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[9] Michael Lydon, "Chuck Berry Lives!" *Ramparts,* VII (December 1969), pp. 47-56; Mike Daly, "Back At It Again As Always: Chuck Berry's Golden Decade," in *Rock and Roll Will Stand,* edited by Greil Marcus (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 28-36; Greil Marcus, "Chuck Berry," in *The Rolling Stone Interviews* (Vol. I), edited by Jann Werner *et al.* (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), pp. 173-187; Carl Belz, "Chuck Berry: Folk Poet of the Fifties," in *The Story of Rock,* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 61-66; Peter Knobler, "Chuck Berry: 'Sweet Little 16 is 32'," *Crawdaddy,* (April 16, 1972), pp. 25-27; Patrick William Salvo, "A Conversation With Chuck Berry," *Rolling Stone,* (November 23, 1972), pp. 35-42; Robert Christgau, "Chuck Berry: Eternal Rock and Roller," in *Any Old Way You Choose It: Rock and Other Pop Music, 1967-1973* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 140-148; Geoff Brown, "Chuck Berry," in *Rock Life,* edited by Gavin Petrie (New York: Hamlyn Publishing Group, Ltd., 1974), pp. 47-51; Arnold Shaw, "Chuck Berry," in *The Rockin' '50's: The Decade That Transformed the Pop Music Scene* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974), pp. 144-147; Fred Stuckey, "Exclusive: Chuck Berry," in *Rock Guitarists* (Saratoga, California: Guitar Player Productions, 1974), pp. 16-19; B. Lee Cooper, "Review of *Chuck Berry's Golden Decade,*" *The History Teacher,* VIII (February 1975), pp. 300-301; *Chuck Berry—The Golden Decade* (New York: ARC Music, n.d.); and Robert Christgau, "Chuck Berry," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 58-63.

[10] Rochelle Larkin, "Ray Charles—That's All!" in *Soul Music!* (New York: Lancer Books, Inc., 1970), pp. 157-164; "Playboy Interview: Ray Charles," *Playboy,* XVII (March 1970), pp. 67-82; Arnold Shaw, "Ray Charles: Soul Supreme," in *The World of Soul* (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), pp. 323-330; Sharon B. Mathis and Susan B. Weber, *Ray Charles* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973); Michael Lydon, "Ray Charles," in *Boogie Lightning* (New York: Dial Press, 1974), pp. 186-229; "Ray Charles," in *Black Music,* edited by Gavin Petrie (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group, Ltd., 1974), pp. 11-15; Tony Cummings, "The Gospel According To Ray Charles," in *The Soul Book,* edited by Ian Hoare, Tony Cummings, Clive Anderson, and Simon Frith (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 6-13; Ben Fong-Torres, "Ray Charles: The Rolling Stone Interview," in *What's That Sound? The Contemporary Music Scene From The Pages of Rolling Stone* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 264-288; Peter Guralnick, "Ray Charles," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 110-113; and Joel Vance, "Remarkable Authority and Rekindling Vigor in Ray Charles' New 'True To Life'," *Stereo Review,* XL (February 1978), p. 112.

[11] Robert Christgau, "Little Stevie Grows Older," in *Any Old Way You Choose It: Rock and Other Pop Music, 1967-1973* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 299-303; Joel Vance, "Stevie Wonder," *Stereo Review,* XXXI (August 1973), pp. 60-62; Loraine

benchmarks for the scholarly analysis of popular music, written reports describing efforts to utilize the lyrical materials of these three black singers for social investigation in the classroom are non-existent.

Perhaps a brief analysis of the works of one contemporary black performer can best serve to illustrate the potential for historical analysis in modern music. As a jazz artist, organist-singer-songwriter Les McCann has gained increasing public exposure during the past decade via the nationwide jazz concert and the image-building promotional activities of the Atlantic Recording Corporation. Since 1969, McCann has served as a major lyrical spokesman for many black Americans. His historical portrait of America and his observations on contemporary events tend to mirror William Lloyd Garrison's dictum about the uncompromising nature of social truth; not unexpectedly, McCann also shares Garrison's flare for hyperbole and political propaganda. This personal idiosyncrasy for absolute judgment seems to generate additional public interest in his utterances. For a social studies teacher concerned with contemporary black social and intellectual thought, the attitudes and impressions articulated by McCann provide numerous illustrations to stimulate students to reflect on the meaning of American life.[12]

In several songs McCann declares his spiritual allegiance to the underprivileged. In 1969, for example, he joined saxophonist Eddie Harris at the Montreaux Jazz Festival in Switzerland to produce the brilliant and controversial tune "Compared to What." This song of social criticism attacks a variety of social practices as being based on hypocritically "unreal values." The singer attempted to compel his audience to acknowledge a "crass distortion" between the social myth of equality and the economic reality of poverty in the stratified American society. On July 8, 1972, at the Newport Jazz Festival in Yankee Stadium, McCann brought the audience to their feet with his rendition of "The Price You Got to Pay to Be Free." The insertion of a few strains from the Black National Anthem ("Lift Every Voice and Sing") in the final chorus reveals McCann's impish genius for blending a gentle civil rights refrain

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Alterman, "Stevie Wonder and John Denver—A Study in Contrasts," *New York Times,* (August 25, 1974), p. 22D; "Black, Blind, and on Top of Pop," *Time,* CIII (April 8, 1974), pp. 51-52; Sam Hasegawa, *Stevie Wonder* (Mankato, Minnesota: Creative Educational Society, 1974); Maureen Orth, "Stevie, The Wonder Man," *Newsweek,* LXXXIV (October 28, 1974), pp. 59-65; John Rockwell, "Stevie Wonder," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* edited by Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 338-339; "Taking Stevie's Trip," *Newsweek,* LXXXVIII (October 4, 1976), pp. 69-70; and Ben Fong-Torres, "Stevie Wonder: 'I Want To Get Into As Much Weird Stuff As Possible," in *What's That Sound: The Contemporary Music Scene From the Pages of Rolling Stone* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 314-318.

[12] The illustrations provided in the next few paragraphs are drawn from the following albums: Les McCann and Eddie Harris, *Swiss Movement* (SD 1537). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1969; Les McCann, *Comment* (SD 1547). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1969; Eddie Harris and Les McCann, *Second Movement* (SD 1583). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1971; Les McCann, *Invitation To Openness* (SD 1603). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1972; Les McCann, *Talk To The People* (SD 1619). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1972; Les McCann, *Layers* (SD 1646). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1973; Les McCann, *Hustle To Survive* (SD 1679). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1975; and Les McCann, *River High, River Low* (SD 1690). New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1976.

with his own vitriolic lyric. The defiant phrase, "Then you're gonna call me a militant—God damn, you got your nerve!" inserted in the song reflects his clear recognition of the frustration experienced by many sensitive blacks. In a 1972 album, McCann thematically combined a Marvin Gaye tune ("What's Going On") with one of his own songs ("Talk to the People") to foster support for the mutual benefits of community interaction instead of the more artificial political-legalistic associations of the past. His observations, thought undeniably idealistic, echo the theories of numerous psychologists and social scientists on interpersonal relationships.[13]

But the genius of any artistic endeavor—whether literary, verbal, or visual—does not lie solely in either the accuracy or the intensity of its social commentary. Les McCann bares his romantic soul in a variety of vocal and instrumental numbers which are interspersed among the socio-political indictments on his albums. In "Comment" McCann calls for all men to be brothers; in "Seems So Long" he speaks passionately of the man-woman relationship and the sadness of lost love. Most historians, of course, would not attempt to analyze areas of affective or non-verbal communication. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that touching the hearts of men through song adds yet another dimension to McCann's pleas for social justice.

In addition to investigating the lyrical commentaries already outlined, an audiohistorian may wish to examine the biographical background of a popular music figure. An examination of the social/psychological development of Les McCann from childhood to jazz stardom, for example, might present several fascinating challenges.[14] Among the periods of his life which could be examined historically by combining audio and literary resources are: (a) his public school education; (b) his experiences in church choirs and with other pre-professional musical groups; (c) the early family and peer influences on development of his ideological commitment to racial pride, individual independence, and human dignity; and (d) his transition from amateur musical status to professional recognition as a jazz great. Other areas of classroom interest might include: (e) his penchant for discovering and encouraging other musically talented individuals (Roberta Flack) and for adapting the lyrics of his contemporaries (Eddie Harris, Gene McDaniels, Marvin Gaye, and Stevie Wonder) to transmit his philosophy of life; (f) his international reputation and appearances at numerous jazz festival performances (Antibes, Montreaux, and Newport); (g) his image of the black man's

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[13] Carl B. Rogers, *On Becoming A Person* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1961), pp. 329-346; Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Theodore Rozak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969); and Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970).

[14] Note the speculative essay by Ralph J. Gleason, "The Education of a Jazz Virtuoso," in *The Creative College Student: An Unmet Challenge,* edited by Paul Heist (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc. 1968), pp. 84-98. Also see Eliot Tiegel, "Funky Pianist McCann Stressing Vocals To Boost His Following," *Billboard,* LXXXI (February 1, 1975), p. 37.

historical experience and goals for the future; and (h) his interpretation of the potential for achieving communication of non-verbal feelings through his music.

It is obvious that study of the music and life of Les McCann can shed additional light on the nature and meaning of the black experience in America during the past decade.[15] His recordings provide a valuable resource for a teacher of black history. McCann's songs contain revealing anecdotes, internalized images and stereotypes, sources of personal and social conflict, confessions of weakness and declarations of strength, and distinctive speech patterns and phrases.[16] His music is vivid in nature, and highly image-laden. The modern instructor of black history must learn to use tools like McCann's music to translate the "Language of the People" into meaningful descriptive ideas which will improve the comprehension of American society.

III. SOCIAL THEMES IN THE LYRICS OF BLACK MUSIC

Although biographical analysis is a useful technique to unfold the personal drama of black history, it can be a difficult method to orchestrate for teaching purposes. An easier and perhaps more productive approach for adding a "voice" to the heretofore mute texts of Afro-American history involves selecting several significant themes for classroom study.[17] Once identified, these themes may be employed to provide a framework for students to arrange recorded commentaries in a manner which will reveal the pluralism within black culture. Hopefully, the interplay of ideas within each thematic structure will encourage each class member to develop a personal position on each central issue.

The following topical outlines and resource materials are designed to illustrate the social theme approach. Each section is thematically organized and headed by a set of six-to-ten concepts which are directly related to each theme. The topics are headed by a central question for reflective examination. They are supported by two types of teaching resources—popular music recordings and textbooks on black music/history—which have been selected to support the theme and to spark student interest, imagination, and creativity.

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[15] B. Lee Cooper, "Oral History, Popular Music, and Les McCann," *Social Studies,* LXVII (May/June 1976), pp. 115-118.

[16] Samuel Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963); Claude Brown, "The Language of Soul," in *Black America: Accommodation and Confrontation in the Twentieth Century,* edited by Richard Resh (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1969), pp. 244-249; William R. Ferris, Jr., "Racial Repertoires Among Blues Performers," *Ethnomusicology, XIV* (September 1970), pp. 439-449; Dorothy Z. Seymour, "Black English," in *The American Language in the 1970's,* edited by Herman A. Estrin and Donald V. Mehus (San Francisco, California: Boyd and Fraser Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 136-143; Paul Oliver, *The Meaning of the Blues* (New York: Collier Books, 1972); and Geneva Smitherman, *Black Language and Culture: Sounds of Soul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[17] B. Lee Cooper, "Popular Songs As Oral History: Teaching Black History Through Contemporary Audio Resources," *International Journal of Instructional Media,* V (1977-78), pp. 185-195.

A. Majority Rule and Minority Rights

Question for Reflective Consideration:

"Does black music reflect the Afro-American minority's hope to achieve social and personal goals through participation in a political system which is designed to respond to majoritarian pressures?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Political Process	Representation	Black Power
Majority Rule	Social Change	Revolution
Minority Rights	Voting	Political Parties
Propaganda	Government	Elections

Songs and Performers:

"Ball of Confusion" (Gordy 7099)
by the Temptations
"The Declaration" (Bell 860)
by the Fifth Dimension
"(For God's Sake) Give More Power To the People" (Brunswick 55450)
by the Chi-Lites
"You're The Man" (Tamia 54221)
by Marvin Gaye
"A Change Is Gonna Come" (RCA 8486)
by Sam Cooke
"Abraham, Martin, and John" (Tamla 54184)
by Smokey Robinson and The Miracles
"Smiling Faces Sometimes" (Gordy 7108)
by the Undisputed Truth

Historical Resources:

Guy and Condie Carawan (comps.), *We Shall Overcome! Songs of the Southern Freedom Movement.* New York: Oak Publications, 1963.

John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (Fourth Edition). (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), pp. 463-511.

Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music.* New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970.

Lloyd Miller and James K. Skipper, Jr., "Sounds of Black Protest in Avant-Garde Jazz," in *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972), pp. 26-37.

B. Violence in the Black Community

Question for Reflective Consideration:

"Is the high level of physical violence which occurs within urban

black communities indicative of the personal frustration and anxiety caused by social discrimination and political isolation?"

Concepts/Issues to be Investigated:

Aggression	Rape	Alienation
Vandalism	Homocide	Hostility
Arson	Assassination	Anxiety

Songs and Performers:

"Big Boy Pete" (Arvee 595)
by the Olympics
"High Heel Sneakers" (Checker 1067)
by Tommy Tucker
"Trouble Man" (Tamla 54228)
by Marvin Gaye
"Stagger Lee' (ABC 9972)
by Lloyd Price
"Born To Be Wild" (Atlantic 2631)
by Wilson Pickett
"I'm Ready" (Chess 1579)
by Muddy Waters
"Smokey Joe's Cafe" (ATCO 6059)
by the Robins

Historical Resources:

William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage.* New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

Otto Kerner (Chairman), *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.* New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson, *Riot Commission Politics: The Processing of Racial Crisis in America.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, Inc., 1974.

C. Religious Commitments

Question For Reflective Consideration:

"Does the image of religion in black music illustrate the hope for social integration and spiritual brotherhood?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Predestination	Segregation	Integration
Brotherhood	Faith	Ethics
Gospel Themes	Morality	Ecumenicism

Songs and Performers:

"Oh Happy Day" (Pavilion 20001)
by The Edwin Hawkins Singers

"People Get Ready" (ABC 10622)
by The Impressions
"Bridge Over Troubled Water" (Atlantic 2796)
by Aretha Franklin
"I'll Take You There" (Stax 0125)
by The Staple Singers
"The Weight" (Atlantic 2603)
by Aretha Franklin
"You'll Never Walk Alone" (Epic 9015)
by Roy Hamilton
"Superstition" (Tamla 54226)
by Stevie Wonder

Historical Resources On Black Music:

Landon Gerald Dowdey (comp.), *Journey To Freedom: A Casebook With Music.* Chicago: Swallow Press, 1969.
Tony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.
Mahalia Jackson, *Movin' On Up.* New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966.
John W. Work (ed.), *American Negro Songs and Spirituals.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1940.

D. Racial Pride

Question For Reflective Consideration:

"How should black music attempt to generate pride in the Afro-American heritage and to illustrate the achievements of the black man in American culture?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Personal Identity	Racial Pride	Afro-American History
Black Heritage	Segregation	Behavior Models
Courage	Dignity	Self Respect

Songs and Performers:

"A Natural Man" (MGM 14262)
by Lou Rawls
"We're A Winner" (Curtom 1966)
by Curtis Mayfield
"Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" (King 6187)
by James Brown
"We're Rolling On" (ABC 11071)
by the Impressions
"To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (RCA. 0269)
by Nina Simone
"It's Your Thing" (T Neck 901)
by the Isley Brothers

"I've Gotta Be Me" (Reprise 0779)
by Sammy Davis, Jr.
"Stand!" (Epic 10450)
by Sly and the Family Stone
"Message From A Black Man" (A & M 0001)
by the Whatnauts and the Whatnaut Band
"This Is My Country" (Curtom 1934)
by the Impressions

Historical Resources:

Claude Brown, "The Language of Soul," in *Black America: Accommodation and Confrontation in the Twentieth Century,* edited by Richard Resh. (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1969), pp. 244-249.

Ulf Hannerz, "The Meaning of 'Soul'," in *The Private Side of American History: Readings in Everyday Life* (Vol. II), edited by Thomas R. Frazier (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975), pp. 336-347.

LeRoi Jones, *Black Music.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1968.

Lynn McCutcheon, "Unsung Heroes Who Also Sang," Negro History Bulletin, XXXVI (January 1973), pp. 9-11.

E. Black Women

Question for Reflective Consideration:

"Are black women depicted as positive, active persons in the lyrics of contemporary songs?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Sexism	Racism	Liberation
Equal Opportunity	Discrimination	Soul Sister
Prostitution	Affirmative Action	Male Chauvinism
Pride		Respect

Songs and Performers:

"Lady Marmalade" (Epic 50048)
by LaBelle
"Mr. Big Stuff" (Stax 0088)
by Jean Knight
"A Natural Woman" (Atlantic 2441)
by Aretha Franklin
"Love Chile" (Motown 1135)
by Diana Ross and the Supremes
"Don't Make Me Over" (Scepter 1239)
by Dionne Warwick
"Think" (Atlantic 2518)
by Aretha Franklin

"Mama Didn't Lie" (Chess 1845)
by Jan Bradley
"To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (RCA 0269)
by Nina Simone
"Black Pearl" (A & M 1053)
by Sonny Charles and the Checkmates, Ltd.

Historical Resources:

Francis M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement,* edited by Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 340-353.

Toni Cade (ed.), *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* New York: New American Library, 1970.

Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (2nd Ed.). New York: Avon Books, 1972.

Gerda Lerner (ed.)., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History.* New York: Vintage Books, 1972.

Charles and Ann Morse, *Roberta Flack.* Mankato, Minnesota: Creative Educational Society, Inc., 1974.

James T. Olsen, *Aretha Franklin.* Mankato, Minnesota: Creative Educational Society, Inc., 1974.

Mary Ellen Washington (ed.), *Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories By and About Black Women.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975.

F. Social Mobility

Question for Reflective Consideration:

"How does black music depict routes of upward social mobility for Afro-Americans?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Social Mobility	Education	Success
Equal Opportunity	Materialism	Access

Songs and Performers:

"Johnny B. Goode" (Chess 1691)
by Chuck Berry
"Dead End Street" (Capitol 5869)
by Lou Rawls
"On Broadway" (Atlantic 2182)
by the Drifters
"Midnight Train To Georgia" (Buddah 383)
by Gladys Knight and the Pips
"Keep On Pushin' " (ABC 10554)
by the Impressions
"Hollywood Swinging" (De-Lite 561)
by Kool and the Gang

Historical Resources:

Lettie J. Austin, Lewis H. Fenderson, and Sophia P. Nelson (eds.), *The Black Man and the Promise of America.* Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, Inc., 1970.

Phyl Garland, "Roberta Flack: New Musical Messenger," *Ebony,* XXVI (January 1971), pp. 54-62.

Steve Glazier, "Richie Havens: From Brooklyn To the Other Side of the Universe" (July 20, 1968), in *The Rolling Stone Rock 'N' Roll Reader,* edited by Ben Fong-Torres (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1974), pp. 282-284.

David Morse, *Motown and the Arrival of Black Music.* New York: Collier Books, 1971.

Arnold Shaw, *The World of Soul.* New York: Paperback Library, 1971.

Joel Vance, "Stevie Wonder," *Stereo Review,* XXXI (August 1973), pp. 60-62.

G. Urban Life

Question for Reflective Consideration:

"Does the quality of life experienced by most Afro-Americans in urban areas illustrate the failure of social planning and political responsibilities in the United States?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Ghetto	Street Wisdom	Block Busting
Discrimination	Urban Renewal	Population Density
Poverty	Public Transportation	Law Enforcement
Unemployment		

Songs and Performers:

"I'm Coming Home" (Atlantic 3027)
by the Spinners

"Ain't No Love In the Heart of the City" (Dunhill 15003)
by Bobby Bland

"Living For the City" (Tamla 54242)
by Stevie Wonder

"Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)" (Tamla 54209)
by Marvin Gaye

"Masterpiece" (Gordy 7126)
by the Temptations

"Dead End Street" (Capitol 5869)
by Lou Rawls

"Bright Lights, Big City" (Vee Jay 398)
by Jimmy Reed

"Spanish Harlem" (Atco 6185)
by Ben E. King

Historical Resources:

Paul R. Enrlich, Ann H. Ehrlich, and John P. Holdren, *Human Ecology: Problems and Solutions.* San Francisco, California: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1973.

Charles Keil, *Urban Blues.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Allan O. Ornstein, *Urban Education: Student Unrest, Teacher Behaviors, and Black Power.* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1972.

Robert Silverberg, "Black is Beautiful," in *The Year 2000: An Anthology,* edited by Harry Harrison (New York: Berkley Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 155-170.

Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History.* New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971.

_____ (ed.), *Readings in Black American Music.* New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971.

H. The Blues Heritage

Question For Reflective Consideration:

"Do the lyrics of popular songs accurately illustrate the historical experiences of the black man in contemporary America?"

Concepts/Issues To Be Investigated:

Slavery	Ghetto Life	Educational Opportunity
Poverty	Welfare Programs	Job Discrimination
Segregation	Racial Pride	Prison Life

Songs and Performers:

"Why I Sing the Blues" (Bluesway 61024)
by B. B. King

"Trouble in Mind" (Colpix 175)
by Nina Simone

"Stormy Monday Blues" (Duke 355)
by Bobby Bland

"Ninety-Nine and A Half (Won't Do)" (Atlantic 2334)
by Wilson Pickett

"The World is a Ghetto" (UAE 50975)
by WAR

"Nobody Knows You (When You're Down and Out)" (United Artists 255)
by Bobby Womack

"Chain Gang" (RCA 7783)
by Sam Cooke

"Busted" (ABC 10481)
by Ray Charles

"Compared To What" (Atlantic 2694)
by Les McCann and Eddie Harris
"Trouble in Mind" (Colpix 175)
by Nina Simone
"War" (Gordy 7101)
by Edwin Starr
"Ball of Confusion" (Gordy 7099)
by the Temptations

Historical Resources:

Samuel Charters, *The Bluesmen.* New York: Oak Publications, 1967.

W. E. B. DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Song," in *The Black Aesthetic,* edited by Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 92-103.

William R. Ferris, Jr., "Racial Repertoires Among Blues Performers," *Ethnomusicology,* XIV (September 1970), pp. 439-449.

LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Carmen Moore, *Somebody's Angel Child: The Story of Bessie Smith.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969.

Robert Neff and Anthony Conner (comps.), *Blues.* Boston: David R. Godine, 1975.

Paul Oliver, *Aspects of the Blues Tradition.* New York: Oak Publications, 1970.

Paul Oliver, *The Meaning of the Blues.* New York: Collier Books, 1972.

Kay Shirley and Frank Driggs (eds.), *The Book of the Blues.* New York: Crown Publications, Inc., 1963.

Derrick Stewart-Baxter, *Ma Rainey and the Classic Blues Singers.* New York: Stein and Day, 1970.

This thematic structure can be easily expanded to illustrate specific points of social, political, or economic concern. For instance, the black man's ambivalent attitude toward material goods can be dramatically demonstrated to students by contrasting Barret Strong's assertion, "Gimme money! That's all I want!" ("Money"—Anna 11101) with the lyrical warning by the O'Jays, "Money can drive some people out of their minds!" ("For the Love of Money"—CBS 3544). One strength of this teaching approach is its flexibility. An instructor may approach a universally relevant concept such as "materialism"' from a variety of perspectives based upon the specific recordings employed. Once such a theme has been identified some members of the class will inevitably attempt to outdo the teacher in assembling their own audio references. Thus, the original two-song dichotomy on materialism—Barret Strong vs. The O'Jays—may be expanded through student suggestions to include

"Busted" (ABC 10481) by Ray Charles, "Money Honey" (Atlantic 1006) by the Drifters, "Spanish Harlem" (ATCO 6185) by Ben E. King, "Patches" (Atlantic 2748) by Clarence Carter, and "Payin' the Cost to Be the Boss" (Bluesway 61015) by B. B. King.

IV. LYRIC RESOURCES

One problem still remains. Where can a teacher of black history obtain the lyrics to the numerous songs listed above? The following selected bibliography provides a broad resource list:

Atkinson, Bob. *Songs of the Open Road: The Poetry of Folk Rock.* New York: New American Library, 1974.

Chuck Berry—The Golden Decade. New York: Arc Music Corporation, n.d.

The Best of Popular Music: First Omnibus of Popular Songs. Miami Beach, Florida: Hansen Publications, Inc., 1968.

Carawan, Guy and Candi (comps.). *We Shall Overcome! Songs of the Southern Freedom Movement.* New York: Oak Publications, 1963.

Dowdey, Landon Gerald (comp.). *Journey to Freedom: A Casebook With Music.* Chicago: Swallow Press, 1969.

Glazer, Tom (ed.). *Sons of Peace, Freedom, and Protest.* Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1970.

Goldstein, Richard (ed.). *The Poetry of Rock.* New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1969.

Hit Parader. Derby, Connecticut: Charlton Publications, Inc., 1941-1977.

Ledbetter, Huddie (edited by Moses Asch and Alan Lomax). *The Leadbelly Songbook.* New York: Oak Publications, 1963.

Lomax, Alan (comp.). *Hard Hitting Songs For Hard-Hit People.* New York: Oak Publications, 1967.

The Motown Era. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Inc., 1971.

Nicholas, A.X. (ed.). *The Poetry of Soul.* New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971.

——— (ed.). *Woke Up This Mornin': Poetry of the Blues.* New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1973.

Okun, Milton (ed.). *Great Songs of the Sixties.* Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970.

Rock and Soul Songs. Derby, Connecticut: Charlton Publications, Inc., 1955-1977.

Sackheim, Eric (comp.). *The Blues Line: A Collection of Blues Lyrics.* New York: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1969.

Savary, Louis M. (ed.). *Popular Song and Youth Today: Fifty Songs—Their Meaning and You.* New York: Association Press, 1971.

Song Hits Magazine. Derby, Connecticut: Charlton Publications, Inc., 1936-1977.

Spinner, Stephanie. *Rock is Beautiful: An Anthology of American Lyrics, 1953-1968.* New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1970.

Wonder, Stevie (edited by Steve Francis). *Anthology—Stevie Wonder.* Miami, Florida: Screen Gems/ Columbia Publications, 1975.

Work, John W. (ed.). *American Negro Songs and Spirituals.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1940.

V. CONCLUSION

Fifteen years ago an eloquent student of black culture declared,

> . . . It seems to me that if the Negro represents, or is symbolic of, something in and about the nature of American culture, this certainly should be revealed by this characteristic music. In other words, I am saying that if the music of the Negro in America, in all its permutations, is subjected to a socio-anthropological as well as musical scrutiny, something about the essential nature of the Negro's existence in this country ought to be revealed, as well as something about the essential nature of this country, *i.e.,* society as a whole.[18]

This observation is still relevant, and until the formal scholarship and the informal oral tradition of the black man is synthesized in the classroom, the value of black history will never be realized. This essay suggests only two innovative instructional approaches—(a) autobiographies of popular music artists and (b) lyrical demonstration of social themes—as models for historical study in the classroom. The ability of teachers to adopt non-tradition (though popular) oral resources remains a question mark. It is my opinion that without the introduction of such innovative instructional techniques, the majority of black and white students will continue to question the validity of black history in their lives.

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[18] LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), pp. ix-x.