

## Responses To The Paper: "Spirituals as Symbolic Expression" Synopsis

My article, "Spirituals As Symbolic Expression" appeared in the Fall, 1977 issue of this journal. It analyzed examples of archetypal material present in Negro Spirituals. The analysis assumed the theoretical formulation of Carl G. Jung, particularly his emphasis upon the theorem of the universality of images and their concrete functionality in the lives of people. The basic thesis of the article stressed that archetypal material in spirituals represented the unconscious strivings of black slaves for ultimate meaning—that is, the material served as a mediating force through which black slaves made sense out of an unfamiliar and hostile environment and established a renewed sense of personhood.

I emphasized the fact that many images appearing in the spirituals transcend the particular time and place of slavery; thus, similar images have occurred throughout the ages in Africa and other areas of the world as persons experienced life and sought meaning. It is this recognition of connection with the history of humankind through the collective unconscious which imbues spirituals with a universal quality. However, the specific content and meaning of these images and, therefore, the uniqueness of the spirituals, emerged from the conditions of slavery and degradation under which slaves were forced to live. Both the unique and the universal must be seen as interrelated in the spirituals. To see them in this light is to see God through the eyes of the slave—a God of history through whom a tremendous reservoir of strength became manifested in the psyches of black people and which the slaves drew upon for nourishment, sustenance and liberation in the midst of suffering and oppression.

Anne Streaty Wimberly