

Preface

This book has been written after a long period of investigation, participation, and instruction in the field of Negro music. There seems to be a need at this time for a treatise on the subject of Afro-American songs and singing from a Negro. Hence, this book represents an effort on my part to meet that need. There is no effort here to answer all questions regarding the subject. There is bound to be, as is always the case, room for improvement based upon latter-day considerations, observations, and convictions. Perhaps these can be expressed in due course. The main purpose of this work is to promote a clearer picture of the nature of Negro songs than is generally possessed today. It is my hope that the young as well as the adult person may find here a concise, friendly, stimulating source that may cause finer interest in a long-beloved subject.

If there are those who find occasion to disagree with certain statements made herein, this differing of opinion is considered a sacred right. It can be stimulating and beneficial if supported by sound premises. If this text can be an incentive for further investigation and bring inspiration to some composers, as well as make new friends for all folk music, our end has been reached.

Acknowledgments of help are best given to those who have sung the songs that have given me much of my knowledge. Many of their names, as well as the names of those who assisted me as guides and informants, are contained in the book proper. However, especial thanks must be extended to Mr. Curley Parrish of Birmingham, Alabama; to Percy Stone of Savannah, Georgia; to the Reverend Levi M. Terrill of Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia; to Principal Kennedy of Dixiana, Alabama; to Dr. Lorenzo Turner of Fisk University; and to Professor William Dinkins of Selma, Alabama. Also, mention should

be made of the painstaking work done by Mrs. Lucille Fletcher Lee in copying much of the music as well as in typing and retyping the manuscript several times. Finally, thanks must be given to my colleagues, present and past: Kemper Harreld, Naomah Maise, Alma Stone, Portia Jenkins Crawford, and Sara Owsley Stivers, all of whom have given some of my findings a sympathetic hearing and performance in choral and solo form. Mr. Harreld's firsthand knowledge of early twentieth-century Negro singers, actors, and instrumentalists has been very helpful. The students of Spelman in particular, and of Morehouse in large measure, have—through their listening, singing, and general interest—provided me with a magnificent testing laboratory wherein I discovered the effect of my discussion and singing on “new ears” above the true folk level.

The late Dr. John Hope, President of Atlanta University, was the first person of high significance and influence to volunteer tangible assistance in my research. It was through his interest and solicitation that Atlanta University and Spelman College procured my first grant.

In recent years and indeed up to the present, Miss Florence M. Read, my own president at Spelman College, procured special assistance for my work from the General Education Board. Moreover, she has given added means and facilities of the college, which were helpful in my completing this book. Without their help this study could not have been realized in its present form.

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