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The Theology of American Popular Music

Volume 3, Issue 2

A collection of essays reflecting on the music of James Brown, Thelonious Monk, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Al Green, Michael Jackson, and Prince; with an introduction to theomusicology by the journal editor, Jon Michael Spencer.

Unsung Hymns by Black and Unknown Bards

Volume 4, Issue 1

This issue functions as a hymnal, providing texts for 100 obscure hymns written by fourteen African American men and women either born into slavery or of the first generation of freedom.

The Emergency of Black and the Emergence of Rap

Volume 5, Issue 1

Focusing on rap as a new form of African American oral expression, this volume presents essays on hip-hop, ghetto culture, Islamic ideology, and the debate over obscene lyrics; with articles on performers Kool Moe Dee and MC Hammer.

The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music

Volume 5, Issue 2

The complete writings of musician and educator R. Nathaniel Dett on the subject of African American sacred music. As these essays demonstrate, Dett remains a leading authority on the black spiritual.

Sacred Music of the Secular City: From Blues to Rap

Volume 6, Issue 1

In sections devoted to popular music forms once identified as “the devil’s music,” essayists including Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, and Andrew Greeley examine the theological meaning of blues, jazz, soul, rock, and rap.

The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music

Volume 6, Issue 2

This volume presents the writings of American composer William Grant Still, known as the “dean of Afro-American composers,” whose diverse career encompassed jazz, traditional African American idioms, the European avant-garde, chamber music, ballet, symphonies, and opera.

The Worshipping Church in Africa

Volume 7, Issue 2

Presenting the proceedings of an important conference held in Blantyre, Malawi, in November 1992, this volume represents a significant step for the African Christian church toward incorporating indigenous African arts and culture into its liturgy. Includes a forward by Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu.

Theomusicology

Volume 8, Issue 1

Drawing upon scholars of diverse backgrounds—including ethics, psychology, and popular culture studies—this handbook to the field of theomusicology sets out to define the philosophical, methodological, and theoretical concerns of the discipline.

*
This work is exactly fifty years old, yet it has never been seen by the public. The publishers whom Willis Laurence James contacted after he had completed the manuscript in 1945 missed a grand opportunity to bring out a work of African American folklore as invaluable as the works of Zora Neale Hurston.

*
That it appears now makes it all the more important as a source of insight into a folk culture of the Deep South that no longer exists as James knew it.



Born at the turn of the century, when many of the oldest black traditions were still transmitted orally in rural areas throughout the South, Willis Laurence James (1900–1966) began to collect in his youthful memory songs that he later raised to the level of choral artistry. He was among that early group of well-educated and highly talented black musicians who undertook the study and preservation of a music widely considered the only indigenous American folk song, next to that of the Native Americans.

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North Carolina 27708-0660

ISSN 1043-9455
ISBN 0-8223-6432-8