

# SPIRITUALS: MUSIC AND MEANING

## Lesson 6: The Legacy



### **1. A Foundation for African American Music:**

Negro spirituals are considered the first uniquely American form of music, blending African rhythms and harmonies with European hymn structures. They laid the groundwork for the development of jazz, blues, and gospel music, all of which owe a significant debt to the spirituals' melodic and rhythmic innovations.

### **2. A Source of Hope and Resistance:**

Despite the brutal realities of slavery, spirituals offered a message of hope and faith, promising a better life, often through coded language referencing biblical narratives and the promise of freedom in heaven. These songs were not just expressions of faith; they also served as a form of covert communication, conveying messages about escape routes and meeting places.

### **3. Impact on the Civil Rights Movement:**

Spirituals experienced a powerful resurgence during the Civil Rights Movement, becoming anthems of the struggle for equality. Songs like "We Shall Overcome" were adapted from spirituals, providing a soundtrack for marches and protests.



The songs' themes of hope, resilience, and faith resonated deeply with activists, inspiring them to continue their fight for justice.

#### **4. Continuing Relevance:**

Spirituals continue to be performed and studied today, preserving a crucial part of African American history and culture.

They serve as a reminder of the struggles and triumphs of those who came before, inspiring new generations to work for social change.

The influence of spirituals can be heard in contemporary music, from gospel and blues to hip-hop and soul.

#### ***We Shall Overcome***

We shall overcome, we shall overcome,  
we shall overcome someday!

Refrain:

*Oh, deep in my heart  
I do believe  
we shall overcome someday!*

We'll walk hand in hand ... some day!

We shall live in peace ... some day!

We are not afraid ... today!

God will see us through ... today!