

# The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation

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Cone explores two classic aspects of African-American culture--the spirituals and the blues. He tells the captivating story of how slaves and the children of slaves used this music to affirm their essential humanity in the face of oppression. The blues are shown to be a "this-worldly" expression of cultural and political rebellion. The spirituals tell about the "attempt to carve out a significant existence in a very trying situation."

James H. Cone, Bill and Judith Moyers Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians in America. His books include *Black Theology & Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, *The Spirituals & the Blues*, *God of the Oppressed*, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Although this book is only slightly revised from its 1972 original (LJ 5/15/72), it deserves special mention because it unites two distinctive African American musical forms--spirituals and the blues--in their concern for liberation from oppression. Cone sees the blues as "secular spirituals" and the spirituals as code language dealing with the meaning of daily existence and hope for present and future transcendence. Highly recommended for all libraries not owning the 1972 edition.

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#### Other Books

*Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, African American spirituality was forged in the fiery furnace of slavery, segregation, and ongoing racial discrimination in both church and society. But African Americans are a people who are strengthened rather than weakened by their experience. This volume traces how African Americans have articulated their faith and love of God in language, song, and daily living. Beginning with its spiritual roots in Africa, Hayes shows how African American spirituality encompassed and incorporated the experience of slavery and the encounter with Christianity. Remarkably, African American slaves were able to find in the religion of their oppressors a message of hope, affirmation, and resistance. Through stories, song, distinctive forms of prayer, celebration, and prophetic witness, Hayes shows how the spirituality of African Americans has nurtured their survival as well as promoting action on behalf of the community and the greater society.

... sought to maintain their freedom ; find missing parents, children , and spouses; and the most prized freedom of all, ... reassuring them that they were God's children and that he had not forsaken them.<sup>23</sup> The Black church movement can ..."