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LET THE CHURCH SING "FREEDOM"

BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON

From 1955 to 1965 the equilibrium of American society was racked by waves of social and political protest. Afro-Americans engaging in massive civil disobedience served notice on the nation and the world that they would no longer tolerate the abuses of American racism. The civil rights movement heralded a new era in the Afro-American struggle for equality.

The movement spread throughout the South, greatly accelerated by the entrance of Afro-American college students who, setting their studies aside, served as organizers and workers in segregated rural and urban communities. They received support from local leaders who listened to them, housed them, and fed them. Sharecroppers, ministers, hairdressers, restaurant owners, independent business people, and teachers were the first to try to register to vote, to apply for a job, or to use a public facility previously reserved for whites.

The response was swift and brutal: economic reprisals, jailings, beatings, and killings. Nonetheless, the movement grew, pulling recruits from all segments of the Afro-American community. The issue of systemized and social racism was placed on the American agenda, and individuals and organizations made the choice to join in supporting a growing and activist Afro-American community. The mobilization of this movement led to assaults against an entrenched system under a generalized concept of freedom and resulted in changes in legal, political, and social processes. Reaching deeper than these sometimes cosmetic changes was the transformation wrought in Afro-America that directly related to the actual waging of the struggle. Of significant importance was the altered stance within a collective community. An overt platform underlining a new agenda for action, visibility, and leadership emerged based on the longheld, often submerged or sublimated sense of worth: the view that within the Afro-American community, America had its richest treasurers of moral and human spirit; and the feeling that white was not only not right for Afro-Americans, but that it was also extremely crippling for whites.

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Music has always been integral to the Afro-American struggle for freedom. The music culture of the civil rights movement was shaped by its central participants: Afro-American Southerners steeped in oral tradition. The freedom songs—while later captured on tape, sheet music, and commercial recordings—truly came to life, were developed, and were used within the context of the Afro-American tradition. The power of the songs came from the linking of traditional oral expression to the everyday experiences of the movement. Charles Sherrod, field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), bears witness to how music galvanized the first mass meeting held in Albany, Georgia, in November 1961, into a moral force of reckoning:

The church was packed before eight o'clock. People were everywhere in the aisles, sitting and standing in the choir stands, hanging over the railing of the balcony, sitting in trees outside the window. . . . When the last speaker among the students, Bertha Gober, had finished, there was nothing left to say. Tears filled the eyes of hard, grown men who had seen with their own eyes merciless atrocities committed. . . . And when we rose to sing "We Shall Overcome," nobody could imagine what kept the church on four corners. . . . I threw my head back and sang with my whole body (Charles Sherrod, quoted in Zinn 1964, 128–129).

Most of the singing of the civil rights movement was congregational; it was sung unrehearsed in the tradition of the Afro-American folk church. This style has its own parameters for defining the range and use of the vocal instruments and its own rules for determining roles for all singers within the group.

The core song repertoire of the civil rights movement was formed from the reservoir of Afro-American traditional song, performed in the older style of singing. This music base was expanded to include most of the popular Afro-American music forms and singing techniques of the period. From this reservoir, activist songleaders made a new music for a changed time. Lyrics were transformed, traditional melodies were adapted, and procedures associated with old forms were blended with new forms to create freedom songs capable of expressing the force and intent of the movement.

Early in the development of each local civil rights movement campaign, strong songleaders emerged spontaneously and came together to form core songleading units. In Montgomery, Alabama, it was the Montgomery Gospel Trio. In the Nashville, Tennessee, sit-ins, it was four young men, students at the American Baptist Theological Seminary, known as the Nashville Quartet. Out of the Freedom Rides and other activities sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality came the CORE Singers. From the Albany, Georgia, Movement came the original Free-

dom Singers, followed by a second group of Freedom Singers and, briefly, the Freedom Voices, made up of field secretaries for SNCC. In Mississippi, SNCC field secretaries Willie Peacock, Sam Block, Hollis Watkins, and Fannie Lou Hamer were widely known for their courage, their organizing abilities, and their power as songleaders. From Birmingham came the Alabama Christian Movement Choir, led by Carlton Reese. Activities in Selma and Chicago brought together Jimmy Collier and the Movement Singers. Out of the pressures and needs involved in maintaining group unity on the community level, while working under conditions of intense hostility and physical threat, the sit-in movement developed its own culture, and music was its mainstay.

During the early sit-ins, music was not usually a part of the actual demonstrations. Sit-in leaders wanted to avoid being charged with rowdiness or uncouth behavior. Most demonstrations were carried out in silence.

The songs of this period came out of the group meetings, rallies, and workshop sessions, while silent marches continued throughout the early months of the movement. Still, John Lewis, Nashville, Tennessee, sit-in leader and later chairman of SNCC, explains why, even then, singing sustained marching:

At the rallies and meetings we sang. One of the earliest songs I remember very well that became very popular was "Amen."

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen
Freedom Freedom Freedom Freedom Freedom

This song represented the coming together, you really felt it—it was like you were part of the crusade, a holy crusade. You felt uplifted and involved in a great battle and a great struggle. We had hundreds and thousands of students from the different colleges and universities around Nashville gathering downtown in a Black Baptist church. That particular song . . . became the heart of the Nashville movement (Lewis 1974).

There is a close correlation between the changes that songs underwent during the Nashville movement—the most highly organized of the sit-ins—and the changes that were heard during the Montgomery bus boycott. "Amen," a traditional Afro-American sacred chant with a one-word lyric, was musically simple, though each succeeding refrain was triggered and refreshed with a new lead-line:

Everybody say
Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen
Let the Church say
Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen
Let the Deacons say
Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

The power of this traditional song came from the richness of Afro-American harmonic techniques and improvisation in choral singing. Within the Nashville setting, it gained a new force by being wedded to a dynamic social upheaval. A simple word change from "Amen" to "Freedom" made it a musical statement of the ultimate national goal of the student activists. In Montgomery the changing of words in the song "Old Time Religion" to "We Are Marching on to Victory," which occurred after leaders had been arraigned by the local law officials, can be equated with the singing of "Amen" in Nashville after the return to the church from a round of sit-ins (Maund 1956). In both cases the activists were returning to a haven after a confrontation with the system they were seeking to change. Again and again, it was to the church that they came for physical protection and spiritual nurturing—the very structure developed by the Afro-American community for the survival of its people. The church provided the structure and guidance for calling the community together; it trained the singers to sing the old songs and gave them permission to create new ones; it sometimes produced real leaders, in its ministers, deacons, and church mothers, who met the challenges and worked to address issues of crisis and everyday survival as they arose. Thus, when the question was put to the churches in local communities, often the doors were opened and the movement had a home, a nurturing ground in which to grow and mature.

The mass meeting provides the most concrete mode of cultural expression from which to view the ways in which the church provided both tradition and room to absorb the changes needed to accommodate the experiences of the new activist community. The following is an examination of a mass meeting with particular concern for the role of song and songleaders in the gathering.

In the fall of 1963 in Greenwood, Mississippi, a meeting was called together by veteran organizer Willie Peacock, a native of Columbus, Mississippi, who had been warned not to return to his community because of his organizing activity. The term "veteran" is appropriately applied to an organizer of Peacock's caliber, not because of his years in the field but because of the intensity of his work over a short period of time. In 1961 Mississippi was targeted for organizing by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Peacock, often teamed with Sam Block, was one of the most gifted of the students who left schools, homes, and safety to throw their lives and pit their skills against a system that promised no compassion and no change. By the fall of 1963 Medgar Evers (NAACP State President) had been murdered by Byron De La Beckwith, a quarter of a million people had marched on Washington, and groups of organiz-

ers had been sent to communities throughout the state of Mississippi to work on a mock election designed to demonstrate that the state was indeed keeping thousands of Afro-American people from registering and voting. Consequently, on this fall evening a few people gathered in a church. Calling them together was one whom they had trained in the church to sing, to organize, and to commit his life to the opportunity for change that had been too long in coming.

Willie Peacock opened the mass meeting by referring to Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, the speaker of the evening. (It is significant that the meeting was being directed by leaders of the community, not necessarily officers of the church: the church served as host, and the central address did not come from the traditional spiritual leader, the minister.) The speaker, Fannie Lou Hamer, was a spiritual leader and a member of the church. Her status as leader came from the experiences she had endured as one of the first Mississippians to try to register and vote. While in most congregations, women were allowed in the pulpit on the traditional Women's Day program, it was not unusual to find a woman in the pulpit of a Baptist congregation during the movement. Peacock ended his reference to Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer as a great speaker by stating that she was also a great singer and asked that she lead in "This Little Light of Mine." Immediately, the powerful contralto voice of Fannie Lou Hamer filled the room. Before she completed the first two phrases of the song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine," she was joined by others in the congregation. The song continued for a few minutes, with new lines signaling each new statement of the cycle.

Jesus gave it me
 Everywhere I go
 Shine, Shine, Shine
 All in the Jail House
 This Little Light of Mine.

The song swelled as it continued, and one could sense the energy level of the congregation being stirred as the last sung line was covered by a rich sprinkling of "Amen's" coming from all sections of the room.

Willie Peacock introduced the next singer as a singer in the struggle from Danville, Virginia, and Knoxville, Tennessee. Matthew Jones led "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize, Hold On," a spiritual he reshaped into a local statement by changing the standard verses.

Greenwood people bowed in jail
 Got no money to go their bail.
 Keep your eyes on the prize,
 Hold on, hold on, hold on.
 Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

This Greenwood-people verse is of course the reworking of the “Paul and Silas bound in jail” verse. This locally inspired substitution continued throughout the song.

Greenwood began to shout.
Jail door opened, and they walked out.

Ain’t but one thing we did wrong.
Stayed in this wilderness a day too long.

Ain’t but one thing a man can stand
Is that chain of hand to hand.

Chief Larry ain’t got no sense.
Fighting nonviolence with violence.

“Ain’t but one thing we done wrong” and the “only thing a man can stand” were not lyrics unique to Greenwood or to the song raised by Jones, but were favored lines used in numerous songs throughout local campaigns wherever they could be placed in the structure of a song. These verses were stock verses that every competent songleader had to have in order to function effectively in a mass meeting.

The mass meeting moved at an informal pace with Peacock deciding how to develop the evening as he went along. He asked Jones for another song, this time Jones sang “We Shall Not Be Moved.”

We shall not, we shall not be moved.
We shall not, we shall not be moved.
Just like a tree, planted by the water,
We shall not be moved.

Again, before the first phrase was completed, the entire congregation joined in. One could soon distinguish voices and their places in the songs as the song service progressed. Fannie Lou Hamer’s voice moved quickly into the background on the alto line, and a high soprano voice could be heard above the other voices throughout the meeting. Peacock carried the tenor line, while a bass worked the bottom. Tight, clear harmony could not be discerned because every sound and texture space between the strongly identified chord and harmony lines seemed worked over for variant lines by the congregation. Volume levels were also not at all matched; one heard the soft subtle voices as distinctly as the loud powerful ones.

One verse that had a Mississippi focus flipped the song around for more than the usual line:

Governor Johnson, we shall not be moved.
Governor Johnson, we shall not be moved.

Governor Johnson, he shall be removed.
 Just like a pail of garbage in the alley,
 He shall be removed!

Jones began this verse in the traditional way with "we shall not be moved." After the "Governor Johnson" line, a number of singers began reworking the lyrics on the second line so that one heard two lines: "we shall not be moved" and "he shall be removed." By the tag line, the lyrics were "just like a pail of garbage in the alley, he shall be removed!" This new shift became a way of handling negative images that one did not want to stand "like a tree planted by the waters," and it was introduced to a new audience even as they sang the song. On this recording one can experience the congregational learning process in operation as the singers discovered something new being added and made the adjustment to the new lyric line. This change is important in view of the fact that this mass meeting revolved around the struggle for the right to vote, an issue for which the governor of Mississippi expressed no support.

As soon as "We Shall Not Be Moved" was released by the congregation, Fannie Lou Hammer raised "Go Tell It on the Mountain." There was no introduction to this song; it seemed to spring out of a readiness in the singers; there was a feeling that the meeting had officially begun and had developed its own spiritual power and pace. Again, with "Go Tell It on the Mountain," the singers borrowed from a spiritual; this time a song more widely known as a Christmas carol was adapted to the needs of the movement.

Go tell it on the mountain,
 Over the hills, and everywhere.
 Go tell it on the mountain
 That Jesus Christ is born.

"That Jesus Christ is born" became "to let my people go."

He made me a watchman
 Upon the city walls.
 And if I am a Christian,
 I am the least of all.

"When I was a seeker/I sought both night and day/I asked the Lord to help me/And he showed me the way" was dropped for a stock movement verse:

Paul and Silas began to shout.
 Jail door opened, and they walked out.

Mrs. Hamer also used verses more associated with the spiritual "Wade in the Water" and continued building the song:

Who's that yonder dressed in black?
Must be the hypocrites farming in back.

Who's that yonder dressed in red?
Must be the children that Moses led.

This last verse had special meaning during the movement, because the director of the SNCC Mississippi Project was none other than a man named Robert Paris Moses. Fannie Lou Hamer had a powerful way of articulating that this was surely a sign from God that it was time for Mississippi Negroes to move.

The last verse of this performance was a traditional verse; another performance would bring another rendering and combining of traditional, stock, and locally influenced verses. The last verse was:

Had a little book that was gave to me,
Every page spelled victory.

After each verse the congregation exploded in song and power. When the pace had rested, Peacock asked if there was a need for more singing—adding that, “I could sing all night”—and introduced the first speaker.

Dick Frye was a white worker from California who was working in the mock election and who had been arrested and beaten on the day of the meeting. His talk was a straightforward narrative describing the work of the mock election as well as the arrest the night before of several workers including himself. He described the beating that took place as he left a courthouse to attempt to get bonds so that those still in jail could be released. Those gathered heard a justification for a mock election set up to prove that Afro-Americans would vote if they could.

When Frye finished, Willie Peacock stated, “Just like Frye said, we got to ‘wade in the water.’ You might have to take over the courthouse.” This interpretation of the spiritual¹ was used often. The concept being that “troubled water” was powerful water. The spiritual promised troubled water.

Wade in the water,
Wade in the water, children.
Wade in the water.
God's gonna trouble the water.

The metaphor of water as troubled water being an element of change becomes in this song a way to urge people to turn in the direction of their

¹“Wade in the Water” is often associated, in the black oral tradition, with Harriet Tubman, a conductor on the underground railway during slavery.

fear, and that when they move in the direction from whence comes their trouble, there is the promise of relief in God-troubled-water. After additional statements that started with what "we might have to do," including the threat of violence if the federal government was not forthcoming in response to results of the mock election, Fannie Lou Hamer led right into the song with verses like:

Some say Peter, some say Paul.
There ain' but the one God made us all.

You can hinder me here.
You can hinder me there.
But the Lord in Heaven
Gon' hear my prayer.

Without a break Willie Peacock led a stirring rendition of "Come Bah Yah." "Come Bah Yah," as led by Peacock, blends several stages of the song's evolution. During slavery, "Come By Here" was sung as a spiritual. It was taken to Liberia, West Africa, where the pronunciation of words already shaped by Afro-Americans in the United States was further altered by the tonal linguistic culture. The Africanized version was re-imported and popularized as "Cum Bah Yah." Although sung in the same mass meeting as "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Wade in the Water" and by the same group of singers, the shift in lead from Hamer to Peacock resulted in a shift in harmonization and vocal textures. The core group of songleaders moved into a smoother, more Western classical choral statement with the tight harmony found in arranged spirituals ("Voices of the Civil Rights Movement" 1980). Out of the warming of the singing of the song, Peacock spoke about the speaker of the evening:

In the spirit of that song—it tells about the suffering that the one who is about to speak has undergone, from time to time, from 1962 up until the present day. The person who was one of the first to go down and attempt to register to vote in Ruleville, Mississippi. At a time when Greenwood was scared to show its face, back in '62, this lady of whom I speak received tremendous harassment, shot at many times, and yet she keeps praying that prayer which the song carries—Fannie Lou Hamer.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a master of the Afro-American spoken word tradition, held forth, weaving a powerful oration, blending the scriptures with her testimony, and calling to those gathered for company, criticizing those not ready to take the opportunity.

After Mrs. Hamer's speech, an elder offered the following testimony:

I have been! I passed! I have boys and girls unless you old people leave Jeff

Davis—This is a new time, This is a new world. My text is to go to the courthouse and keep on going.

Out of his statement Fannie Lou Hamer led into “Have You Got Good Religion? Certainly Lord”:

Have you got good religion? Certainly Lord.
 Have you got good religion? Certainly Lord.
 Have you got good religion? Certainly Lord,
 Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord.

In song, the questions continued, moving into the issues of the movement:

Do you hate segregation?
 Do you want your freedom?
 Have you been to the courthouse?
 Did you try to vote?
 Do you love everybody?

With the last verse Mrs. Hamer released the power of her lead, but before the song ended another voice came in with a verse that further localized the statement: “Will you tell Martha Lamb?” (Lamb was the registrar whom people had to face when they went to the courthouse.)

This practice of a song that first seems to be ending being picked up by a new leader is very common within the songleader tradition. However, in this case the new leader began her new line in the wrong key. And Hamer, again within the tradition, rescued the situation by covering the wayward leader with a superior line, clarifying the key, and stabilizing the singing. Hamer continued the singing, but this time it was “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom.”

I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom.
 I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom.
 I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom.
 Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.

Walking and talking with my mind . . .

Singing and praying with my mind . . .

This gospel song was brought into the freedom song repertoire during the Freedom Rides when the Freedom Riders were jailed in Mississippi in 1961. It had been a popular quartet song entitled “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Jesus.” A Rev. Osby of Aurora, Illinois, is cred-

ited with revamping the text in the Hinds County jail. Mrs. Hamer's singing of the song is very much in the same mode as it was throughout the South in the freedom version. Before the civil rights movement, quartet songs with a bridge were almost never done as congregational songs. One would have vigorous participatory support, but tightly harmonized bridges were not congregationalized. It was very common to find congregations in mass meetings moving effectively through these kinds of changes. In this song Mrs. Hamer makes the change with "I'm gonna," moving into a kind of vamp on eight repetitions of "walk, walk, walk, walk"; then in a chord change up a fifth to eight repetitions of "talk," bringing the bridge to an end with "oh——walk walk" into "cause it ain' no harm to keep your mind," opening up the next verse.

As soon as the song was finished, Peacock asked Matthew Jones to sing one of his compositions. Jones began by telling the story of a G.I. from Danville, Virginia, stationed at Fort Bragg who, responding to the brutality with which the law officials met demonstrators in his hometown, decided that when he went home, he was going to demonstrate wearing his uniform. Jones spent time sharing a cell with the soldier and wrote "Demonstrating G.I."

I'm a demonstrating G.I. from Fort Bragg.
The way they treat my people makes me mad.
You know that I couldn't sit still,
Because my home town is in Danville.

Jones sang this song in a calypso ballad style, accompanied by handclapping and footpatting from the congregation. In the second chorus, he was joined by a few straggling voices. When he came out of the McNamara verse, he asked people to join in and the congregation responded:

I'm a demonstrating G.I. from Fort Bragg.
The way they treat my people makes me mad.
You know that I, I couldn't sit still,
Because my home is in Danville.

I came home one Friday night.
I saw my sister fighting for her rights.
I said, "Keep on, Sis, and I'll be back
Standing tall, in my boots so black."

Sitting in camp I read the paper.
I said to my sargeant, "I'll see you later."
I caught a bus and came on home.
"I told you, Sis, you wouldn't be alone."

I got arrested on Sunday eve.

The policemen said, "You've been overseas,
But don't you forget one simple fact,
That your skin is still black."

Secretary of Defense McNamara
Said, "Come on boy, what's the matter?"
I don't care if you fight for freedom,
But please take off that uniform.

Out of this singing of the song about a companion community engaged in struggle, Jones introduced and sang another song—a ballad documenting the assassination of Medgar Evers who was killed in Mississippi in 1963 at the time of the Danville campaign. The congregation joined in very quickly in the chorus, cast in a Western hymnlike setting reminiscent of the "Ballad of Jessie James." This meeting was full of people who knew and respected Medgar Evers. They had lived with his work as state president of the NAACP and had very recently lived through his death. As the song continued, the room seemed to become softly washed in its sound. When the song was over, Peacock quietly said, "Let us stand and sing our closing song." Without another cue, Fannie Lou Hamer's voice once again raised the song that had become the signal song of the movement: "We shall overcome/We are not afraid/God is on our side/We'll walk hand in hand." The meeting was closed in song and prayer ("Mass Meeting" 1963, Tape N33).

The Greenville mass meeting was just one of thousands held during the organizing days of the movement that stretched from Montgomery to the Poor Peoples Campaign in 1968. As it is in most cases, the role of congregational song was crucial; clearly, on this fall evening in 1963 more than sixty percent of the time was devoted to songs. In most of these mass meetings, all songs were to some extent derived from church-based literature. Exceptions occurred in cases where guests offered solos or where, in the case of a Jackson, Mississippi, meeting, the street-based freedom song repertoire was used. The last song of this meeting, "We Shall Overcome," is again a song of the Afro-American congregational-style church. The introduction of this traditional song into the growing repertoire of freedom songs was in part due to the presence of Guy Carawan from the Highlander Folk Center in Mount Eagle, Tennessee, in the Nashville sit-in movement. This song had been brought to Highlander during the 1940s by white tobacco workers on strike at the American Tobacco Company in Charleston, South Carolina. The striking workers, at Highlander for a workshop in union organizing, reportedly told Zilphia Horton, then Highlander's director of music and the wife of director and founder Miles Horton, that this was a song sung by Afro-American members of the un-

ion local on the picket line. Horton added the song to her workshop repertoire. She taught it to Peter Seeger in 1947, and it was published in a People's Song Bulletin in 1949. Guy Carawan sang it as one of the songs shared in mass meetings and workshops with the Nashville students who led the sit-ins in that community in 1960 (Reagon 1975, 64–89).

But Nashville students were not the first movement activists to hear the song. Guy Carawan recounted an incident at a Highlander workshop in 1959, attended by people from Montgomery, where the song was pressed into service:

It's amazing what strength this song has. It's just unbelievable sometimes how it can bring people together. One night in 1959, a group of about 60 of us had assembled at the Highlander School. It was the end of a workshop, and we were having punch and cake and seeing a movie. The local police and sheriff burst in. You see, Tennessee officials were always trying to break up the school—they considered it subversive—and a couple of years later they succeeded. Well, for an hour and a half they forced the people—some of them students—to sit in the dark while they went through rooms and searched suitcases and bags. Somebody started to hum "We Shall Overcome" and someone else took it up. Then from a Negro girl—a high school student (Mary Ethel Dozier) from Montgomery, Alabama—a new verse came into being. Sitting there in the dark, this girl began to sing, "We are not afraid, we are not afraid today" (Lowen 1965, 2–8).

From workshops at Highlander and rallies or sit-in activities, "We Shall Overcome" traveled to Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, where over two hundred sit-in leaders met, on April 15–17, 1961, with members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). At the end of the first evening, Guy Carawan began to lead songs. When "We Shall Overcome" began, everybody stood and joined hands, and from that point on it was the signal song of the movement (Carawan 1974).

We shall overcome.
 We shall overcome.
 We shall overcome someday.
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
 We shall overcome someday

Of this song, Reverend Wyatt T. Walker, second Executive Director of SCLC, wrote:

One cannot describe the vitality and emotion this hymn evokes across the Southland. I have heard it sung in great meetings with a thousand voices singing as one. I've heard a half a dozen sing it softly behind the bars of the Hinds County prison in Mississippi. I heard old women singing it on the way to work in Albany, Georgia. I've heard the students singing it as they

were being dragged away to jail. It generates power that is indescribable. It manifests a rich legacy of music literature that serves to keep body and soul together for that better day which is not far off (Carawan and Carawan 1963, 11).

The civil rights movement was a “borning” struggle heralding a new period of activism for its time. New ground was broken and prepared, and a foundation was laid that would make it possible for ever-widening segments of society to discover ways in which unacceptable conditions of life could be changed. These methods included organized action against oppression, disenfranchisement, and exploitation. Such action would begin to create a climate that would nurture a standard of life based on equality of opportunity and human dignity. And the cultural and moral underpinning was there—a foundation laid by the Afro-American church, certainly also created for the crucial purpose of struggle; and the church was indeed a freedom singing church.

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