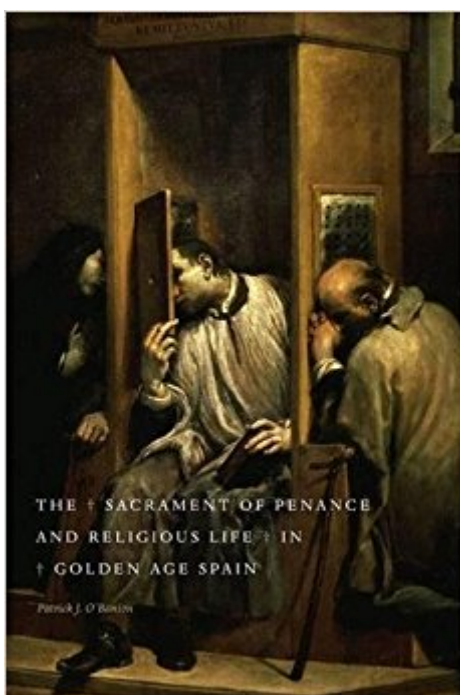


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# Nothing But Love In God's Water: Volume 1: Black Sacred Music From The Civil War To The Civil Rights Movement



## Synopsis

The first of two volumes chronicling the history and role of music in the African American experience, *Nothing but Love in God's Water* explores how songs and singers helped African Americans challenge and overcome slavery, subjugation, and suppression. From the spirituals of southern fields and the ringing chords of black gospel to the protest songs that changed the landscape of labor and the cadences sung before dogs and water cannons in Birmingham, sacred song has stood center stage in the African American drama. Myriad interviews, one-of-a-kind sources, and rare or lost recordings are used to examine this enormously persuasive facet of the movement. *Nothing but Love in God's Water* explains the historical significance of song and helps us understand how music enabled the civil rights movement to challenge the most powerful nation on the planet.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Nothing but Love in God's Water, volume 1, fills a significant niche in the already-voluminous library of the civil rights movement. While previous Pulitzer Prize-winning books have definitively covered the movement's leaders, politics, strategies, philosophy, and impact, the literature related to the influence of the music to the movement has barely been addressed in meaningful, systematic fashion. *Nothing but Love in God's Water* does that and more.” —James Abbingdon, *Journal of American History* “The African American spiritual tradition long ago overflowed its cultural banks to become a wellspring for

quintessentially American sacred and secular music. In *Nothing but Love in God's Water*, Robert Darden meticulously and mellifluously charts that flow from the origins of the spiritual as a balm against the pain of slavery to adaptation and repurposing as a means of empowering, uniting, and persevering in the struggle for civil rights. Darden offers an essential guide to the evolution of a tradition, the myriad springs, eddies, and crosscurrents that over centuries fed into the enduring river that is the legacy of African American sacred song.

—Jerry Zolten, Pennsylvania State University, author of *Great God Almighty! The Dixie Hummingbirds: Celebrating the Rise of Soul Gospel Music*

“This book is absolutely brilliant! Part social history, part investigative reporting, and a lot of sound cultural analysis with a touch of theological reflection, this magnum opus illuminates the importance of black sacred music within the civil rights movement. *Nothing but Love in God's Water* reveals black sacred music as a liberating expression, a tool for liberation, and the most important chronicle of the liberation experience. Robert Darden's tome is accurate, well written, captivating, and full of insightful interpretations of the power of music within the African American experience.”

—Emmett G. Price III, Northeastern University, executive editor of *Encyclopedia of African American Music*

“As Americans take to the streets in protest over the loss of African American lives in Ferguson, Baltimore, New York, and elsewhere, the power of the singing army cannot be overestimated. Although decades have passed since the Civil Rights movement of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. era, protesters are not turning to today's popular song canon to set their marching cadence. They are still singing the old standards, such as ‘I Shall Not Be Moved,’ and ‘We Shall Overcome.’ Like previous generations, they are harnessing the power of black sacred song to lift the spirit of the oppressed and turn the heart of the oppressor. Darden's book provides an eminently readable and consistently fascinating history of how this came to be.”

—Robert M. Marovich, *Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal*

In this first volume of a projected two, Darden . . . gets immediately to the heart of his subject: music validates the African rites of passage and while continuing that role in African American history provides the commentary and response to all subsequent aspects of black life and society. Alert to the church as the haven for more than worship, the author illustrates this manifested from the plantations to the Fisk Jubilee Singers to the gospel music of Thomas Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson. Seeing the cultural fabric as a unit, Darden looks at the protests and responses within blues and jazz as well as in the sacred. The author is knowledgeable about the literature on the subject and has produced a work that will be useful to a broad audience. Scholarly readers will find the expansive bibliography and 26 pages of endnotes of particular value.

—D.-R. de Lerma, *Choice*

The first volume of Robert Darden's timely and readable book, *Nothing but Love in*

God's Water, offers a well researched, notated and indexed lens through which to focus an evaluation of protest music based on African-American sacred song. "Kim R. Harris, America Magazine" African-American music and its revolutionary potential, whether in the form of slave spirituals or the protest songs of the Civil Rights Movement, is relatively well-trodden ground amongst scholars. Where Robert Darden diverts from, and adds to this historiography, is in highlighting the reach and impact of black musical forms within sections of white American society. . . Darden presents a compelling study of the impact of African-American music, making excellent use of both the rich historiography, and the various black musical genres. "Thomas Strange, Journal of Ecclesiastical History"

Robert Darden is Professor of Journalism, Public Relations, and New Media at Baylor University. He is a former gospel music editor for Billboard magazine.

Wonderful book. Full of great information. A must read.

Robert Darden's book "Nothing But Love In God's Water" is a historical document that is a fascinating read for anyone interested in the roots of American Black gospel, blues and jazz. The book's subtitle is "Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement," but the creation of that music pre-dates the civil war. The period of time from the arrival of the first African slaves to North America until the end of the American Civil War was the incubation period that produced the genesis and evolution of what came to be known as "the spirituals." The old songs are our collective consciousness, perhaps even in our genes. They are our spiritual chromosomes. They make us who we are as a people." --- Gloria Scott Originally the spirituals were protest songs that brought hope to the slaves as they suffered the forced servitude of their daily lives. . Songs like "Go Down Moses," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Steal Away," "Wade In the Water" and John Brown's Body, which became "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," sang of escape and freedom and used biblical imagery to rail against the injustice of their position. The songs were coded messages that transported information from one plantation to another in plain sight. The melody of the songs remained consistent, but the lyrics changed according to the message that they were bringing. The period of time between the "Emancipation Proclamation and the birth of the "Modern Civil Rights Movement" became the crucible where the "Spirituals" were transformed into gospel, blues and jazz entered the mainstream. White society in general began to attend concerts performed by Colored Jubilee groups that sang spirituals after the Civil War, which led to the creation of Minstrel shows as

the dominant form of entertainment during the last half of the 19th century. Darden then explains the way that minstrelsy then evolved into vaudeville. Darden demonstrates how the jubilee groups and minstrel shows featured genuine and watered down spirituals, first sung by mixed sex jubilee groups, but later evolving into all male barbershop quartets. Darden explains that until the turn of the 20th century barbering was a black trade, so all quartets were colored. He presents the birth of the street minstrel's, like Blind Willie Johnson and Blind Willie McTell who were recorded and bridged the gap between the spirituals and the blues. The "Great Migration" North, follows, as major cities like Chicago, Detroit and Harlem NY, become destinations for a better standard of living, creating a renaissance of Negro music, film and literature. It wasn't until after the 1st World War, that the Labor Unions began to accept Black workers for menial jobs, while at the same time annexing their music including the spirituals for inspiration. "A singing army is a winning army, and a singing labor movement cannot be defeated." --- John L. Lewis Darden demonstrates that it was the labor unions embracing the black workers and their music that led to the further development and acceptance of Negro music. That same music eventually became the inspiration that led to the formation of the civil rights movement in the 1950's. The workers rights movement as advocated by the IWW or Wobblies, from the beginning of the 20th century used music to carry it's message. It was during this phase that Negro songs of protest were brought to the ears of White society in general. It was the intertwining of unions songs of Joe Hill and Ella May with Negro Spirituals that gave birth to modern day folk music, gospel and blues. Poet Carl Sandburg considered the spirituals poetic and included some in his books, which helped transform them further into the voice of the masses. "Nothing But Love In God's Water is a fascinating book that will expand the readers knowledge and understanding of the way that Black sacred music developed into one of the most influential music forms in the world, by transforming an entire nation through Biblical imagery. Bob Gersztyn

Darden has done it again! Having read Darden's history of gospel music, People Get Ready, three times, I came to this book expecting an exuberance for the topic, a synthetic use of source materials, and a lively writing style. I was not disappointed.

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