Gospel and West African Musical Traditions

As it developed in the United States, Gospel music reflected the influence of West African musical traditions. Common threads include these:

Call and Response: The interaction between a speaker and listeners in which the speaker's statements ("calls") are answered by the listeners. The responses may take many forms, including sung words, shouts, claps, and other sounds. The same lyrics may be repeated over and over again.

Group Singing: When multiple people sing at the same time. This type of performance was very common in West African religious tradition, but not very common in the white American Christian religious tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries. White Christian services of the time typically had no choir; any singing was usually by a soloist.

Musical Instruments: Musical instruments, often homemade and based on West African instruments (such as the Djembe drum; the Kora, a stringed instrument similar to a harp or guitar; and the thumb piano). White Christian services of the time typically had no instruments; any singing was typically done *a capella* (without instrumental accompaniment).

Complex Rhythms and/or Movement: Complex rhythms (multiple layers of percussion) were a part of West African music. In Gospel, this can be found with multiple instruments (drums, tambourine, piano) playing different rhythms or different voices singing different rhythms.