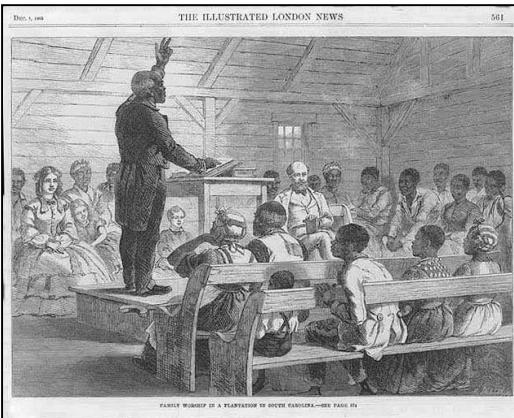




Gospel Music: History and Glossary



A worship service on a plantation in South Carolina, 1863

The history of Gospel music is intrinsically linked to the African-American experience in U.S. history. Its roots can be traced back to the era of slavery. In the South, small black churches and Christian worship services were a part of life on many plantations. Basic features of Gospel music, such as a call-and-response dynamic and the inclusion of complex rhythms, can be traced back to the West African traditions that slaves brought with them to America. Set against the backdrop of the pain and suffering endured by slaves in the U.S., music in these worship services took on a heightened emotional character.

After emancipation, African Americans who stayed in the South began to establish independent black churches and Gospel music continued to play a central role. And as the Great Migration in the 20th century spread African-American culture, community, and customs to new cities across the country, Gospel gained a wider audience.

Gospel also has an extraordinary and often underappreciated influence on 20th century popular music. Many recording artists, singers, and musicians, including Aretha Franklin, began their musical careers performing in Gospel choirs. To this point, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records, the man who coined the term "Rhythm and Blues" while working at *Billboard* magazine, has said that he wished he had called it not "Rhythm and Blues," but "Rhythm and Gospel."

Call-and-Response	<i>Definition:</i> A musical interaction in which the first and often solo phrase (the “call”) is answered or echoed by a second and often ensemble phrase (the “response”).
Complex Rhythms	<i>Definition:</i> Multiple layers of percussion or clapping were a vital part of West African music. In Gospel, this can be found when multiple instruments (drums, tambourine, piano) play different rhythms, or when different voices sing different rhythms.
Emphatic Vocal Delivery	<i>Definition:</i> Singing with “religious feeling” in Gospel often equates to strong vocal delivery by a commanding soloist, supported by powerful group singing from the choir and/or the entire church congregation.