



Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music (The African American History Series)

By Burton W. Peretti

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Since their enslavement in West Africa and transport to plantations of the New World, black people have made music that has been deeply entwined with their religious, community, and individual identities. Music was one of the most important constant elements of African American culture in the centuries-long journey from slavery to freedom. It also continued to play this role in blacks' post-emancipation odyssey from second-class citizenship to full equality.

Lift Every Voice traces the roots of black music in Africa and slavery and its evolution in the United States from the end of slavery to the present day. The music's creators, consumers, and distributors are all part of the story. Musical genres such as spirituals, ragtime, the blues, jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, rock, soul, and hip-hop—as well as black contributions to classical, country, and other American music forms—depict the continuities and innovations that mark both the music and the history of African Americans. A rich selection of documents help to define the place of music within African American communities and the nation as a whole.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is an impressive and highly readable short narrative history of African American music. Peretti's treatment of the social and cultural dimensions of the music is especially compelling. (Waldo E. Martin Jr., University of California, Berkeley, author of *No Coward Soldiers*)

Peretti scores . . . in the ambitious task of capturing the many and varied contributions of African Americans to our musical heritage. Recommended as a college text or as a brief overview for general readers. (*Library Journal*)

Lift Every Voice is distinguished by its unique scope and intended audience. . . . These texts do the important work of bringing readers into contact with actual manifestations of the culture(s) analyzed throughout the book. . . . It performs its function admirably. (*The Journal of Popular Culture*)

Peretti skillfully synthesizes decades of scholarship. He makes complicated music understandable by the layperson. He makes many insightful connections between African American music and its African antecedents. It is refreshing and rare (if not unprecedented) to see sections on classical, gospel, and avant-garde music referenced in the same context as blues, jazz, and soul music. And Peretti's analysis of the unequalled chart success of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album is the best attempt I have seen to ascertain why the album resonates so strongly in African American culture and among audiences worldwide.

(*Journal of American History*)

A well-researched and well-written introduction to the riches of African American music and its cultural context. An excellent book for the undergraduate classroom or the general reader. (Gerald Early, Washington University in St. Louis, editor of *Miles Davis and American Culture*)

Burton W. Peretti's *Lift Every Voice* contributes to a much-needed discussion of African American musical history by providing an important, albeit brief, visitation of the social issues entwined in the professional experience of some of the United States' most important and influential artists. While there is no shortage of works that interpret the how and why of influential trends and performers, there is a need for books that provide a succinct who, what, when, and where of African American music since the 1970s. This type of "blue collar" scholarship, particularly focused on more modern music, would greatly add to the currently available literature. *Lift Every Voice* speaks to this need not only as a contribution to scholarship in African American music, but to a broader understanding of American society. (*Journal of American Folklore*)

About the Author

Burton W. Peretti is professor of history at Western Connecticut State University and author of *Jazz in American Culture*.

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