The Book of American Negro Spirituals

This stirring collection of Negro spirituals, edited by the great Negro poet James Weldon Johnson and arranged for voice and piano by his brother J. Rosamond Johnson, presents 120 of these melodic—and intensely moving—religious folk songs for contemporary performance. The original language has been...
An appreciation of African-American spirituals, written in 1867. In the next, the conflict is at its height, and the lurid imagery of the Apocalypse is brought to bear. This book, with the books of Moses, constituted their Bible; all that lay between, even the narratives of the life of Jesus, they hardly cared to read or to hear. XII. Down in the valley. Is there likelihood that the American Negro will be able to do this? There is, for the good reason that he possesses the innate powers. He has the emotional endowment, the originality and artistic conception, and, what is more important, the power of creating that which has universal appeal and influence. 4. The book was brought out in London, where Phillis was for several months an object of great curiosity and attention. 44. Phillis Wheatley has never been given her rightful place in American literature. By some sort of conspiracy she is kept out of most of the books, especially the text-books on literature used in the schools. Of course, she is not a great American poet—and in her day there were no great American poets—but she is an important American poet. Spirituals (also known as Negro spirituals, Spiritual music, or African-American spirituals) is a genre of songs originating in the United States and created by African Americans. Spirituals were originally an oral tradition that imparted Christian values while also describing the hardships of slavery. Although spirituals were originally unaccompanied monophonic songs, they developed into harmonized choral arrangements. 5 Johnson, James Weldon, ed., introduction to The Books of American Negro Spirituals: Book I (New York, 1925), quoted in Katz, pp. xxxvii–viii. See also Brown, Sterling, Negro Poetry and Drama and The Negro in American Fiction (New York, 1969), pp. 15–21. Many of the Negro spirituals reflect this identification... ‘Crossing the river Jordan’ meant not only death but also the entrance into the very real heaven and a release from an earthly bondage. ... But at the same time...this freedom was one that could only be reached through death.’ Those spirituals which reverberated loudest with the glories of heaven also excoriated whether openly or by implication the horrors which the slave encountered in an alien world.