

THE SOUL ROOTS OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S AMERICAN DREAM

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Bruce Springsteen's reputation stands as the voice of white working-class America, the heroic poet-everyman of the Rust Belt's white ethnic working class and its intelligentsia. Most scholars place him in the social realist musical tradition of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan which hearkens back to the fetishization of male workers that informs the Whitmanesque.¹ Yet for nearly a decade (1973–82), Springsteen was best known as a dynamic live performer, a rock-and-roll showman who appropriated many of James Brown's performative gestures for marathon four-hour shows that were, in effect, his translation of Brown's stagecraft, the energy and dramatic gestures of the self-proclaimed "hardest-working man in show business." In 1974 Springsteen's E Street band owed far more to the model of an integrated soul-funk band like War or Sly and the Family Stone than to, say, the Rolling Stones: it had two African American members—jazz pianist David Sancious along with saxophonist Clarence Clemons—and the half-Hispanic drummer Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez. (Lopez was at first replaced by an African-American jazz drummer, Ernest "Boom" Carter, before current long-time drummer Max Weinberg became an E Street member in mid-1975.) The title cut of Springsteen's second album, "The E Street Shuffle" (1974), was a soul-funk tune he admittedly riffed off of a Curtis Mayfield–penned R&B hit for Major Lance called "Monkey Time" (1963), while in his

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spare time Springsteen wrote and produced soul-tinged songs for the other successful white Asbury Park R&B band, Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes.²

Issues of race and African American culture have not been central to the scholarship on Bruce Springsteen, and one old joke has it that in concert (since 1975) there are more African Americans on stage than in the audience—that is, saxophonist Clemons is the only black presence in the room.³ When Springsteen has attempted to connect musically with African American audiences—on the club mixes of “Dancing in the Dark” (1984), for example, or “57 Channels (And Nothing On)” (1992)—he has failed. “Bruce [has] never had much of a black audience,” biographer Dave Marsh reflects, “[yet] he draws on a musical history developed primarily among African-Americans . . . [and he] sings more often than not in a voice derived from blues, R&B, soul and gospel.”⁴ In this article I will theorize Springsteen’s debt to “soul,” a term often simply associated with the lived experience of “being black,” as defined in the late sixties by sources as diverse as Aretha Franklin and anthropologist Ulf Hannerz.⁵ As I will show, if we frame Springsteen not through the content of his songs but through his *philosophy of live performance*—his investment in moving audiences toward existential affirmation and social justice—then he is a Euro-American avatar of the African American soul tradition.

Springsteen’s debt to African American music in general (and soul in particular) remains underdeveloped within a substantial body of critical work. His debt remains an open secret: according to a New Jersey journalist who followed him around for a year, Springsteen “loves James Brown” and “has Smokey Robinson’s voice in his head when he writes songs.” On a recent concert performance for *VH-1 Storytellers*, Springsteen paid homage to the latter when, after performing “Waiting on a Sunny Day” (2002), he burst into a second take of the song, demonstrating how Robinson might sing it. Yet neither Brown nor Robinson rates an entry in *The Ties That Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to E to Z* (a Springsteen encyclopedia), and both receive only passing mentions in the literature. More important, there are extramusical aspects to this debt that allude to formative notions—for Springsteen—of self, community, and democracy.⁶

For example, at a July 7, 1981, concert in Stockholm, Springsteen introduced his composition “Independence Day” with a typically long, confessional anecdote. In introducing this ballad about a son leaving home due to his embattled relationship with his father, Springsteen identified African American music as, in effect, the trigger event that both enabled him to reject his father’s blue-collar conservatism while also jumpstarting his quest for a distinctive interpretation of freedom. “Back in the ‘60s people were asking a lot of questions about the forces that shape their lives,” he reflected,

[but] the only place I ever heard [about] it was at night listening to the radio. . . . It seemed like in those songs by The Drifters and Smokey Robinson, there was a promise, and it was just the promise of a right to a decent life. . . . That you didn't have to live and die like my old man did, working in a factory until he couldn't hear what you were saying anymore.⁷

Despite his more overt debts to Elvis and Dylan, Springsteen here claims to have heard the "promise of a right to a decent life" in the grain of African American voices during the soul era. In terms of racial discourse and music history, false generic distinctions continue to obscure the complex tapestry of the postwar musical world with regard to gospel, jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, rock-and-roll, and soul.

Springsteen grew up in Freehold, New Jersey, a factory town that seemed to portend a joyless future of hard, repetitive work; in a family without cultural interests, rock-and-roll was the art form that brought in messages of hope, spirit, rebellion, freedom, sex, and pleasure. "Rock and roll came to my house where there seemed to be no way out. It just seemed like a dead-end street, nothing I liked to do, nothing I wanted to do, except roll over and go to sleep." In the mid-sixties, Springsteen had no aspirations to either fame or artistry when rock-and-roll "snuck in . . . and opened up a whole world of possibilities." By the early 1970s, he began immersing himself in the "craft and power" of rock-and-roll—or "rock and soul," as Marsh terms it—as much through the formative songs of Chuck Berry, Roy Orbison, and Phil Spector, as through those of Dylan, Robinson, The Who, and the Beach Boys. Springsteen studied pop songcraft as young novelists study the techniques of Faulkner or Toni Morrison, and his early compositions "slipped easily into grooves based on soul rhythm patterns." He did not differentiate in terms of race or culture (musically) between the Animals or the Rolling Stones on the one hand, or "soul hits by Sam Cooke, Martha and Vandellas and the rest of Motown" on the other, and he absorbed with seemingly equal force the songs of "Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd and other Stax artists, [as well as] Mitch Ryder's and the Rascals' white twists on rhythm and blues."⁸

For Springsteen, "rock-and-roll" is an inclusive term. It has become a restrictive phrase in discourse, synonymous with either late-fifties music or a genre distinguished by white performers, a heavy backbeat, guitar solos, and blues song structures. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s, there was little separation for listeners, and nearly all young audiences were equally open to soul, R&B, and Motown—genres that presume black performers, gospel-trained singers, a more fluid, flexible rhythmic groove, and open expressions of sexual desire. In the early 1970s, Springsteen lived in the decaying resort town of Asbury Park, where he recalled "blues, R&B, and soul were still heavily influential and heard often along the Jersey Shore."⁹

Despite the decisively *whiter* musical turn Springsteen's recordings took beginning with *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978), his theatrical performative style—his physical intensity, high-energy showmanship, self-reflexive monologues, and use of call-and-response—remains indebted to African American exemplars. More to the point here, Springsteen's theories of *performer-audience interaction* owe more to African American gospel-based models and traditions of affirmation than to rock's calling cards of Dionysian revelry, adolescent rebellion, transgression, and Horatio Alger narratives.

Springsteen is a *social artist*: the artist as self-conscious representative of a specific community. This ideal is germane to African American models of musical icons but antithetical to prevalent Western models—the romantic, the avant-gardist, the social rebel.¹⁰ In contrast to such archetypes of the creative individual, social artists always have their *audiences* in mind, in the sense of considering how to sustain and provoke them—that is, how to speak with and for them, how to create presence and resonance. And in contrast to commercial artists, the social artist does not consider him- or herself an embodied commodity reproducing what consumers want, but a self-conscious artist providing what a given audience might *need*. “You can’t conform to . . . always giving the audience what it wants,” Springsteen said in the late seventies,

or you’re killing yourself and you’re killing the audience. Because they really don’t want it either. Just because they respond to something doesn’t mean they want it . . . [sometimes] they [just] respond automatically to things they think they should respond to. You’ve got to give them more than that. Someone has to take the initiative and say, “Let’s step out of the mold. Let’s try *this*.”¹¹

His success as a social artist *guiding* his audience—rather than as an entertainer giving the audience what it wants—has been confirmed by scholars of Springsteen fandom. Eric Alterman of *The Nation* once asked an online discussion group of Springsteen fans, “Why does Bruce matter?” Here are the first four answers he received: “He makes me feel like I belong in this world.” “Bruce Springsteen’s art keeps my conscience alive.” “He matters to me because he is like my backup heartbeat.” “His music creates an internal dialogue that [helps] us discover who we are.”¹²

Springsteen is also a *soul* artist, a tradition he internalized via embodiment, orality, recordings, and a long musical apprenticeship of club dates. In other words, he learned it by extrapolating from a musical and performative tradition he now inhabits but of which he remains, in many ways, unaware. In Marcel Mauss’s classic essay on embodiment, “Techniques of the Body,” the anthropologist referred to the emulation of cultural gestures and poses as acts of “prestigious imitation,” in that a person “imitates actions . . . which he has seen successfully performed by people in

whom he has confidence and who have authority over him." There were many such figures for Springsteen—including Elvis, Dylan, and Smokey Robinson—but in terms of performance, the social artist he emulated most was James Brown.¹³

Springsteen will function here as an example of a cultural studies problem identified by musicologist Susan McClary:

[O]ur difficulty in telling a coherent history of music in the twentieth century stems . . . from our refusal to acknowledge one of the most important facts about culture of the last hundred years: namely, that the innovations of African Americans have become the dominant force in music around the globe—universal in ways Kant could not even have begun to imagine.¹⁴

Springsteen's work draws on various African American traditions, yet unlike Dylan, for whom theatrical *masking* has always been second nature, Springsteen insists upon his authenticity. The ability to project sincerity and spiritual struggle through vocal style is a criterion of having soul in the African American mode, as revealed in black vernacular phrases of the "soul era" that singers must "tell it like it is," "be who they are," and "be pure."

How did this "dominant force" of soul influence the wiry kid from New Jersey? I will make three claims: (1) Springsteen built his performative philosophy—what he calls his "stagecraft"—from the African American soul tradition; (2) Springsteen's theory of community emerged more from soul's secularization of gospel than from Woody Guthrie's vision of social democracy; (3) Springsteen's inability to recognize this line of influence has resulted in the fetishizing of Clemons's blackness in concert, a highly visible sign of this unrecognized tradition. These claims will come together in the second half of this article with an analysis of two live performances from the 1999–2000 tour.

The core of my argument is twofold: (1) to provide a new theory of soul music as *performance ritual* (rather than vocal style); (2) to analyze Springsteen's unconscious adaptation of this ritual for communicating his core thematic messages. In contrast to Joe Cocker, Eric Burdon, Dusty Springfield, or even Van Morrison, Springsteen never appropriated soul's vocal style, nor did he imitate African American dance moves on stage, as Mick Jagger did. Rather, he appropriated soul's gospel-derived theatricality and its musical philosophy of community. If at first he mined this tradition to produce high-energy concert communion, in the past decade he has begun to self-consciously preach the (formerly) implied messages of soul's secularized communion. Springsteen's current concert rhetoric represents a shift away from his youthful reproduction of the individualistic American dream of material wealth (e.g., in "Rosalita" or "Thunder Road") to envisioning a *collective* American dream of self-actualization

within a supportive community. *This* American dream—of a rejuvenated democracy reclaimed by fighting for social justice—Springsteen channeled from soul music, the soul ritual, and the soul tradition.

Theorizing Soul: The Sacred/Secular Crossroads in African American Music

By “soul” I refer to the secularized performative practices of the gospel service; this article is meant as a corrective to scholarship that situates Springsteen’s religious tendencies solely within Catholicism, the belief system in which he was raised. For example, the writer-priest Andrew Greeley considers Springsteen a contemporary “meistersinger,” a troubadour with a “Catholic imagination” who invokes the Catholic ritual by illuminating “religious realities—sin, temptation, forgiveness, life, death, hope—in images that come . . . from his Catholic childhood.”¹⁵ In a secular take on these ideas, Jim Cullen suggests Springsteen has an “analogic imagination,” such that his songs create a space for Catholic faith and prayer not at church but at mundane sites such as a dance club (“All That Heaven Will Allow”), a neighborhood party (“Mary’s Place”), or even a woman’s body (“Leap of Faith”). These scholars evade Springsteen’s outright hostility to Catholic dogma, normative sacred practice, and repressive sexual values. In his early song, “If I Was a Priest,” Springsteen cast the icons of Catholicism in a frontier Western town: the Virgin Mary is a hooker and a junkie, yet runs Sunday mass; the Holy Ghost runs a burlesque tent and steals souls (like Satan) rather than saves them. With respect to Springsteen’s stage persona, such scholarship elides his decade-long ridiculing of Christian hucksterism in concert set-pieces such as “Pink Cadillac” or “Light of Day”: in these mock-sermons, Springsteen employed a white evangelical preacher’s voice and overwrote traditional Christian morality with empowering liberal populism as expressed through consumer imagery. Finally, Greeley claims Springsteen embodies the “dancing, creative self of the Catholic,” yet does not explain this idea and I confess it eludes me; neither priest nor congregation dances, shouts, or improvises. Such practices do, however, apply to what singers and musicians just call the “Black Church,” with its call-and-response, emotive testifying, hand-clapping choirs, and its constant interplay between exegetical preachers, seconding congregations, and propulsive rhythmic narrative.¹⁶ The religious matrix of Springsteen’s *lyrics* indeed derives from Catholicism, with emphasis on the possibility of grace, the problem of evil, and the ongoing cycle of sin, redemption and rebirth. However, the performative matrix of Springsteen’s stagecraft is indebted to the soul tradition.¹⁷

Craig Werner has theorized American music within three musical approaches—“the blues impulse,” “the jazz impulse,” and “the gos-

pel impulse"—and he rightly slots Springsteen into the latter tradition due to his "vision of spiritual community," the "gospel moan" in his voice, and for keeping "the tradition of call and response alive in white music."¹⁸ For Werner, the gospel impulse requires a three-step process of emotional narrative. First, the singer must acknowledge the burden of everyday life; second, he or she must bear witness to its pain, struggle, and loss; third, the singer must find and embody redemption through emotional performance.

Musicians grounded in the gospel impulse . . . bear witness to the troubles they've seen. . . . The gospel singer testifies to the burden . . . [and] the testimony touches what we share and what we deal with when we're on our own in that dark night of the soul. The word "witness" works because the burden involves history, [and] power.¹⁹

Performers within the soul tradition secularize the preacher's role in their embodiment of the narrative of redemption. Nearly every soul singer, from Sam Cooke to Otis Redding, began his or her career in gospel quartets, and absorbed church ritual and the preacher's role. "See, I had *always* wanted to be a preacher," Sam Moore of Sam and Dave declared in an oral history, claiming that the duo's performative aesthetic derived from the gospel service: "[W]e had church with 'em, we preached 'em . . . [w]hat you saw was two guys doing church." According to Moore, the duo's hits synthesized what was already in soul music—"the gospel harmonies . . . gospel melodies, gospel songs . . . gospel chord progressions and gospel singing inflections"—and added "the C.L. Franklin preaching style [Aretha's father]."²⁰ James Brown alludes to a similar conflation in a spoken confession opening "Public Enemy #1" (1972): "when I was a kid, I said I was gonna be a preacher . . . and maybe I am, but . . . I feel like I'm [more of] a teacher." In rhetoric familiar to Springsteen fans, Brown reflects on his calling: "I feel that he who has been successful should look out for his fellow man. . . . I feel that's my role, that's my job."²¹ Springsteen's stagecraft draws directly on this conflation of religion, embodiment, and stewardship crafted by soul singers in general and James Brown in particular.

The concept of soul partakes of what I will call, building on the work of many African American scholars, "the sacred/secular crossroads." Since 1972 theologian James H. Cone, the primary theorist of a distinctively African American liberation theology, has claimed that all African American secular musical expression aspires to the same objectives as its sacred forms.

In contrast to the spectator approach of the Western theological tradition, the black religious perspective on suffering was created in

the context of the human struggle against slavery and segregation. Whether we speak of the spirituals or the blues, the prayers and sermons of black preachers or the folkloric tales of Br'er Rabbit . . . black reflections about suffering . . . [are] *involved* in life, that is, the struggle to affirm humanity despite the dehumanizing conditions of slavery and segregation.

For Cone, what legitimates an African American musical form is its resonance with live audiences; the performer must generate an energy field that he calls a "socioreligious consciousness." Do African Americans respond vocally, verbally, kinesthetically? "Their response is the only test."²² Thus, any new idea must be legitimated in performance and created in-the-moment: it must (first) validate quotidian acts of suffering, then (second) reclaim a sense of everyday human dignity, and (third) reattach the narrative of the secular dream of transcending injustice.

Following Cone, musicologist Jon Michael Spencer has changed his field's label to "theomusicology." The latter term reflects his findings that all African American secular musical forms synthesize the sacred and profane. Spencer suggests that *theomusicology* as a field should mirror the musical forms under analysis such that scholarship becomes "cultural criticism for the purpose of causing social change—increasing individual development, democratic operations, existential sustenance, political relevance, and human progress." Kimberly Rae Connor, a Euro-American scholar of religion, calls these musical forms "liberating textimonies" that move audiences toward "transcendent realms of experience." For Connor, art does the work of liberation theology when it "functions to reflect and to transform society, based on a particular vision of self and other." Scholars often single out Euro-American musicians working this tradition: for example, Connor has a chapter on jazz bassist Charlie Haden and his Liberation Music Orchestra, while Paul Gilroy claims John McLaughlin, Dave Holland, and Joe Zawinul as soul artists in seventies jazz. In a similar vein, Amiri Baraka places Springsteen in the tradition of "the black country blues shouter" (e.g., Leadbelly, Howlin' Wolf), and suggests that with his loud, hoarse vocal style—as on "Born in the USA"—Springsteen "translate[s] both the form and some of the content of the blues" into his musical practice.²³

"Liberation theology," "theomusicology," "liberating textimony"—these terms all refer to the permeable border between sacred and secular musical practice in African American music. From blueswoman Ida Cox, Sam Cooke, Little Richard, and Reverend Al Green—all of whom jumped back and forth from sacred/gospel to secular/pop—to Sonny Rollins, Hampton Hawes, and Mary Lou Williams, all of whom claimed jazz as a spiritual vocation, African American musicians have often worried this musical line.²⁴ In the seventies, when Springsteen called rock-and-roll a

"big, gigantic motivator," he was also walking this fraught musical line. As Marsh then reflected, "Bruce's faith in rock and roll and what it can do—not just for him, but for anybody—is complete. . . . [For him], rock and roll is the great spiritual alternative of the age." Thirty years later, Springsteen's rhetoric has become unconsciously infused with liberation theology. "The *shout* for freedom . . . was implicit in rock and roll from its inception," he told *Rolling Stone* in 2004. "Freedom can only find its deepest meaning within a community of purpose."²⁵ First, the concept of a "shout" that signifies "freedom"—and not just volume or enthusiasm—derives from the African American "ring shout" and the gospel tradition of ecstatic celebration. (It was notably secularized in the Isley Brothers' hit, "Shout" [1959].)²⁶ Second, freedom as defined "within a community of purpose" derives from African American religion and social movements, and it is the antithesis of "freedom" in its individualist form. Such rhetoric points to Springsteen's current attempts to consciously unify individual and social meanings of freedom.

To understand the meaning of *soul* as a musical genre within a larger cultural movement—as in soul music, the slogan "soul power," soul food, and having "soul"—we need to see the music and these vernacular phrases as markers of the historical period from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, and in both sacred and secular terms. Charles Keil and Ben Sidran, both jazz musicians and American Studies scholars writing in the late 1960s, date soul's incipience to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, claiming it ushered in a new era of hope for social equality and thus created a new structure of feeling for African Americans.²⁷ That same year, Ray Charles created the genre by fusing gospel, jazz, swing, and R&B into popular, secular song. A few years later, Sam Cooke scandalized African Americans when he left the Soul Stirrers—then the most popular gospel quartet in the nation—for a career in popular music. Jazz musicians concurrently created the genre of "hard bop" by infusing gospel and R&B into bebop, often under the sign of soul or dubbed "soul jazz" (e.g., John Coltrane's *Soultrane* [1958], Ben Webster's *Soulville* [1957], Cannonball Adderley's *What Is This Thing Called Soul?* [1960], and Johnny Griffin's *The Congregation* [1957]).²⁸

Every "singer, writer and producer" interviewed by Peter Guralnick for his definitive work on the genre, *Sweet Soul Music*, remembered the shock of Ray Charles' "I've Got A Woman." "[I]t's hard to imagine the impact that it [the song] had in 1954 and 1955 for blacks and whites, for a young Elvis Presley and an only slightly older Sam Cooke." For African American listeners, who made it a hit, "the very stratagem of adapting a traditional gospel song, putting secular lyrics to it and then delivering it with all the attendant fanfare of a pentecostal service was, simply, staggering." It became "the archetype tune" of soul, a work of popular music less derived from the songwriter's craft or studio polish than "the

uninhibited, altogether abandoned sound of the church . . . the keening, ecstatic voicings." More to the point here, along the sacred/secular crossroads, "[f]or a generation of black listeners it served as an unabashed celebration of negritude without the covering mask of religion."²⁹

Soul music's signature scandalous move was to take gospel songs and, with minor emendations, turn them into sexually charged love songs. Famously, Ray Charles turned the spiritual, "This Little Light of Mine" into "This Little Girl of Mine"—with the Raelettes, his back-up singers, functioning as "a kind of lascivious church choir." J. W. Work's spiritual "Ain't That Good News" became reworked as Sam Cooke's "Ain't That Good News." Other sex-charged songs built on gospel tropes include Ray Charles's "Hallelujah, I Love Her So," Jackie Wilson's "Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher and Higher," and Aretha Franklin's "Save Me." In concert, performers secularized gospel practices such as hand clapping and call-and-response. For example, in Sam and Dave's live cover of Sam Cooke's "Soothe Me" (1968)—a song Cooke recorded in separate gospel and pop versions—an organ provides a simple gospel accompaniment while Sam Moore asks the audience to put their hands together; the response is immediate and deafening.³⁰ Then the drum kicks in and Moore begins call-and-response around the phrase, "soothe me," with Dave singing "oh yeah," and the audience joining in. Moore isn't satisfied: "Come on everybody, clap a little louder than that. *Make me* feel good, won't ya?" This introduction takes a full minute, at which point the entire audience is singing "soothe me" as back-up. This is how one can measure socioreligious consciousness as created by the ritual performer: when he or she feels the concentrated (and consecrated) presence of the crowd through hands, body, and voice.

Lyrically, Cooke's "Soothe Me" stretches itself across the sacred/secular crossroads as well: "Soothe me, baby, soothe me / soothe me with your kindness / for you know / your *powerful loving* is / soothing / to me." Instead of being grounded by the love of the Lord, the narrator is healed by his woman. "How I used to ramble / how I used to roam / but since I met / this baby of mine / all I do is come on home." If soul represents the secularizing of "liberation theology," that means its crossover practices brought African American history, memory, and experience into popular culture. Guralnick summed up its effect on black consciousness.

Musically . . . soul remains the story of how a universal sound emerged from the black church. Historically, it represents another chapter in the development of black consciousness, similar to the Harlem Renaissance . . . in the championing of negritude, but more widespread in its immediate impact.³¹

But much gets lost in translation—that is, in the crossover—as will be discussed below in an analysis of Springsteen's soul ritual.

In the mid-1950s, the church-trained vocal stylings of African American gospel were completely new to American popular music. Its emphasis on emotional self-expression, ecstatic vocals, call-and-response, and exhaustive performance—what Guralnick calls its “tortured emotionalism”—was antithetical to swing, jazz, country, folk, and even blues. Yet it took less than a decade for the music and ritual of Afro-Christian worship to take shape in Aretha Franklin’s performances, creating a sense of communion across racial and class divides through a “masterful display of vocal dexterity[,] . . . down-home foot-stomping, [and] intense and demonstrative performance style.” The daughter of national religious leader Rev. C. L. Franklin of Detroit, Aretha was soul’s peak crossover artist, yet Atlantic Records founder Jerry Wexler claimed she simply “continued what Ray Charles started . . . the secularization of gospel music.”³²

If Ray Charles created the musical genre in terms of aesthetics and vocal style, James Brown—“the Godfather of Soul,” “Soul Brother #1”—codified the soul ritual that was Springsteen’s model. From Brown, Springsteen must have realized how to exploit the thematic conceits of populism, hard work, and working-class pride. Brown worked to wear out his audience, to “give people more than what they came for,” his tenor saxophonist J. C. Davis recalled, “make them tired, ‘cause *that’s* what they came for.” Even among soul singers, Brown was known for his appeal to working-class black audiences. “He’s not gonna come out there and be cool,” recalled a childhood friend. “And he ain’t gonna have on this pretty suit that ain’t gonna get dusty. He gonna *wallow*. He gonna just be dancin’, splittin’, messin’ up his knees. Or he may scream so hard he can’t sing the next night.” Taking nothing away from such dynamic stage acts as Otis Redding or Sam and Dave, it was Brown who embodied the soul ritual as it migrated from the church, creating a method for turning any song-text into a “liberating textimony.” Brown’s “manner and technique,” according to Spencer, “was imitative of the oratory and dramaturgy of the black preacher.”³³

Here’s how the soul ritual goes. In “Lost Someone” on *Live at the Apollo* (1962), James Brown preaches about making a mistake, begs for forgiveness from his lover, and declares his unworthiness (“I’m so weak, I’m so weeeee—eee-eak,” he moans). Brown then claims to sing as much for the audience as to unburden himself—“I’m not doing this just for me / I’m doing this for you, too, now”—and promises to treat his lover better if she returns. This is an eleven-minute song and Brown wrings it out, mixing the rhetorical techniques of preachers with gospel vocals. Guralnick’s depiction of Brown’s performative style also applies to Springsteen:

[his] sense of how to pace a show, the very rise and fall of the action, and the singer’s use of aurally dramatic technique as he moans, groans, screams, and whispers, draws back from the mike only to

return with explosive impact, uses every trick in the [gospel] book.
 . . . [He] create[s] a portrait of himself that achieves verisimilitude
 . . . by acknowledging the necessity of dramatic artifice.³⁴

Brown split off from Sam Cooke's polish and Ray Charles's exuberance to immerse himself in ecstatic performance. "I feel like I'm gonna scream," James Brown warns audiences in the middle of songs, adding to the tension of the soul confession. Such statements create call-and-response ("you tell it, James Brown"), but such interjections also bring a sense of dramatic, heroic narrative to the singer's emotional journey. But where Mick Jagger and others drew on Brown's "moans, groans, screams, and whispers," Springsteen alone adapted Brown's expertise of "pac[ing] a show," his mastery of how "the very rise and fall of the action" sustains an audience through musical narrative. For most white singers, Brown modeled the physical moves that mirrored soul's vocal histrionics; for Springsteen alone, Brown was methodology and stagecraft.

The conductor of either the soul ritual or the gospel service requires the ministrations of the audience in return. According to Rev. Gardner C. Taylor, the leader of the Progressive Baptist Convention, "The magnificent anomaly of [black] preaching is . . . that the person who preaches is in need himself or herself of the message which the preacher believes he or she is ordained to utter."³⁵ This sounds confusing since it is such a paradox. It is the preacher's or singer's ability to embody the congregation's (or audience's) psychological and emotional needs that creates the soul circuit. The soul performer needs *the response* of the audience for rejuvenation as much as the audience needs *the call* of that performer. The soul artist thus earns the audience's trust at the secular/sacred crossroads because the daily struggle for survival can be ascertained through the artist's qualities of voice, gesture, and embodiment. As Charlie Parker once said: "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out your horn."³⁶

Spencer simply calls James Brown "the most charismatic preacher of the secular world that black folk had ever witnessed." During the soul era in particular, Brown "helped *unchurched* brothers and sisters to rediscover black religion, which overflowed from the church into the secular Soul community." For poet and activist Thulani Davis, Brown's music was "proof that you could leave the church and still be saved once in awhile."³⁷ Nearly every soul singer—including Brown—would have absorbed the narrative structures and emotional modes of preaching by osmosis from his or her experience in gospel quartets. Sam Moore calls "the black church" an alternative music school, "since we didn't have money for no music lessons."³⁸ So to return to my opening question regarding Springsteen's introductory comments to "Independence Day" in 1981: what messages might these singers have carried into their

songs, vocal styles, and performances that communicated to the teen-aged Springsteen the “right to a better life”?

During the postwar generation, African American preachers emphasized the relationship between divine deliverance and the specific collective dream of African Americans. Many sermons were built upon an 1898 article by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner entitled “God Is a Negro,” and the minister Howard Thurman published an influential work in 1949, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, which was read as a manual of resistance for the disenfranchised. (Martin Luther King Jr. carried a copy of this book around his entire life.) That the “disinherited” would achieve equality and justice through active pursuit of social and political change—Cone’s definition of liberation theology—was mirrored on the secular side. During “Negro Week” at the 1940 New York World’s Fair, Lawrence Reddick, the librarian of Harlem’s Schomburg Library, declared simply: “The American Dream is the dream of the Negro.” The statement came at the climax of a long speech about the role of African American music in all areas of American life, and Reddick suggested that the denial of the music’s importance signified a failure on the part of Americans to identify the truths of their history or their culture. Further, Reddick argued that until and unless the core concepts of American freedom, liberty, and equality were felt by African Americans as a group, the nation could not lay claim to its founding ideology. These ideas were germane to what I am calling Springsteen’s *collective American dream* as it was first manifested in postwar preaching.³⁹

Toward that end, the sacralized intentions of soul music in part allude to “baring the soul” through raw emotional vocals and the writhings of the body. Like Brown, Springsteen stripped down during the course of his shows from sharp-dressed man to sweating, open-shirted soul worker.⁴⁰ In terms of dramatic narrative, Springsteen often delivered one or two fifteen-minute-long bardic stories per show—“rock sermons,” I call them—in which he made his struggles, trials, and aspirations universal. In this attempt to create a temporary community of his audience, Springsteen mythologized himself and his parents, his band and his Catholic school education, Jersey girls and Manhattan streetlife. In one of his favorites, Springsteen narrates going up on a hill with Clarence Clemons (his totemic soul figure) to ask God to support his career choice against those of his father (lawyer) and his mother (author). Amidst a thunderous explosion of drums and feedback, God answers: “*Let it rock.*” Springsteen was never entirely joking, and such appropriation of the narrative style of black preaching remains central to his stagecraft. (See fig. 1.)

Moreover, despite Baraka’s validation of Springsteen as a country blues shouter, his stagecraft owes little to the blues tradition. “I was never that into blues,” Springsteen told a British interviewer in 1978, “I was into the r&b/soul thing.” He became a legendary live performer through the length and high energy of his shows, his physical intensity,

and the E Street Band's long, drawn-out, dramatic, grooving jams. "Just when you thought the song was over, you'd be surprised by another section, taking the music higher. It was, in spirit, what I'd taken from the finales of the great soul revues," Springsteen reflected on his early career. "When you left the stage after performing one of these, you'd worked to be remembered."⁴¹ Springsteen here understands his stagecraft within a musical tradition (the "soul revue"), and considered it his right to borrow, steal, and synthesize from its practitioners.⁴²



Courtesy of Dennis R. Floss

* * *

By the late 1960s, the term "soul" was prominent enough as a synonym for African American culture and experience to draw Euro-American scholars into fieldwork: Lee Rainwater's anthology *Soul* (1970); anthropologist Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (1969); and Charles Keil's theory of soul performance in *Urban Blues* (1966). Rainwater summarized the elements of soul given by African American men: "strong emotions and feelings, especially when shared with others; something pure, nonmachined; [someone with] staying power and wisdom through suffering; telling it like it is, being what you are, and believing in what you do." Informants unfailingly claimed music as the main social institution of soul, and along with dance and folk tales, it constituted the means by which lower-class blacks "instruct, explain, and accept themselves." Cut off from the dominant society's value system, African Americans developed "[a] distinctive patterning of existential perspectives [and] techniques for coping with the problems of social life," in particular creating "a set of survival techniques for functioning in the world of the disinherited." (In 1968 a cover article on Aretha Franklin in *Time* was entitled "Lady Soul Tells It Like It Is.")⁴³

Soul was an emergent African American structure of feeling for expressing emotions and aspirations at the secular/sacred crossroads. To B.B. King, "soul" stood for both "beautiful music with its Southern roots showing strong," but also the sign of "black people [being] . . . more vocal about the respect we wanted and the good feeling we had about ourselves."⁴⁴ In *Urban Blues* Keil analyzed the "soul and solidarity" ritual in the concerts of B.B. King and Bobby "Blue" Bland.⁴⁵ He chose the term "ritual" (and "ritual audience") rather than "performance" since a ritual audience is "committed rather than appreciative," and presumes a performer in "more of a belief role than a creative role." The soul "practitioner" is expected to share deep feelings and "tell it like it is"; in so doing, "soul ideology ministers to the needs of identity and solidarity." As one bluesman told Keil: "They [audiences] expect work . . . hard work. And if you're workin' hard and enjoyin' it, they'll enjoy it too." The performer's "self-assurance is a rare commodity" and he or she brings "considerable force" to bear on individual and collective identity. How does this work? Keil quoted a Chicago woman on a call-in show to a black radio station: "I believe that soul is the energy or the mind of human beings. And how this is transformed into activity . . . is really [the] incarnation of one person's idea into another." Keil recasts her statement this way: "To say, 'B. B. King [or James Brown] is my main man,' is to say, 'I take pride in who I am,' and to convey that members of the audience believe that 'the man stands for his people, the people for their man.'" When Keil maintains that "soul is best defined in action"—that is, in performance—he means

an audience bears witness to the performer's perseverance, to "what a man's been through." As several informants claimed, "soul has to do with staying power—having survived, you carry on."⁴⁶

Now we come to the heart of the soul ritual for a secular society. In recalling his first contact with soul music in 1970 at a concert of The Voices of East Harlem in London, Paul Gilroy realized within a few minutes "how close that particular public world of the vernacular was to a religious experience." For Gilroy the emotional success of soul music depended upon its "anti-representational element" with regard to the sacred, and "the word *soul* [itself] was a useful way of talking about precisely those communicative qualities that exceed the power of language to recapture." Gilroy points to soul as a metonym for the sacred/secular crossroads: "Soul . . . is about marking those intensities of feeling that were readily assimilated into religious language and experience [—] a spiritual exploration [—] but it allows us to value them as a secular and sometimes [even] profane phenomenon." Significantly, when asked to define soul, Gilroy instead gave an example: he quoted the Bob Marley line, "'When it hits you, you feel no pain.'" This salve, this cooling of everyday anxiety by immersing one's self in a musical world—this balm in modernity—has few secular analogues.⁴⁷

To extrapolate from Gilroy, the soul vocalist conducts a ritual of what one might call *secular transcendence*. The vocalist must communicate "emotional truth" in the grain of the voice, the texture of experience revealed, the conviction of the narrative, the rhythmically insistent vocal declamations, and the ability "to tell it like it is." If successful, the performer establishes solidarity—meaning simply, the right to speak for and to the audience. Yet "soul music" is not religious; it is crucial that the suffering seems secular and historical, not sacred and transcendent. For Gilroy, this connection communicates "a simple but fundamental truth about what it means to occupy our particular modernity. . . . It's not redemption but a sign of the impossibility of that redemption."⁴⁸

In fact, James Brown's "Soul Power" (1970)—as song and vernacular phrase—caught on among African Americans as a marker of black pride *after* the major successes of the civil rights movement. In Scott Saul's analysis, "soul power" supplanted "we shall overcome" precisely because it looked to the future: the former phrase had a past, "a dignified history," when what was needed "was a slogan for the now." As if mediating civil rights gains and black nationalism, "soul power" simultaneously managed to "echo the ethic behind 'black power' . . . while substituting righteous good feeling . . . for explicit separatism." Soul power became the sign of "collective empowerment . . . [in] its cultural dimension," and, as such, indicated a "basis of action and commitment, a way of being in the world." Saul's analysis dovetails with jazz legend Ornette Coleman's association of *soul* with "deep feeling" and "change."

"Soul must have something to do with where it's always positive and it's always complete," the composer and alto saxophonist reflected; it signals a personal "choice that you can change."⁴⁹

All the pieces are in place now to concisely render a theorization of the soul ritual: A soul performer embodies an existential modernity by leading a temporary collective ritual that cannot be religious since it contains no theology. Yet it must provide some of the release of religious ritual—for example, a feeling of redemption, of communal belonging, of attuned suffering—to open up the sacred/secular crossroads and create a method for individuals in an audience to "feel no pain." When Springsteen asserts that a rock concert should be "part political rally, part dance party, and part religious revival," he stakes a claim to the soul tradition.⁵⁰

To summarize: In the mid-1950s, soul music combined gospel with jazz, blues, swing, and jump-style rhythm and blues. The "soul performance" emerged as a secular ritual of transcendence that validated everyday suffering and survival while resonating with elements of African American experience and collective memory. A successful soul artist must access and share strong emotions, display wisdom through suffering, tell it like it is, and be sincere in his or her execution. Soul power represents pride in African American identity, experience, culture, and history, and *soul* signifies a secular belief system *invested in the potential for change*. Finally, rejuvenation of the individual audience member takes place at a secular/sacred crossroads where one's powerlessness is first represented by the soul artist and then transcended by affirming its connection to a meaningful narrative. The performer and audience create a *soul circuit*.

How does an artist learn to create this soul circuit? Using the terms of my argument, here are a series of Springsteen's comments about his relationship to his audience from a single interview in 2003. The arrangement of statements and the interjections are mine.

SPRINGSTEEN: The audience is not brought to you or given to you, it's something that you fight for. You can forget that, especially if you've had some success: Getting an audience is HARD. Sustaining an audience is HARD. It demands a consistency of thought, of purpose and of action over a long period of time . . . You have to be willing to risk, to step up and enter your particular arena and stake your claim to a piece of it.

HOW DOES HE SUSTAIN THAT AUDIENCE?: I always come back to the same thing: It's about work—the work, working, working. Write that next song and put that record out; speak to my audience and continue to have that conversation that's been going on for so long. After a while you build up a large body of work that serves as a foundation.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS INTERACTION?: To be worth something it has to be connected to an element of energy and creative thought.

HOW IS THAT ACCOMPLISHED?: Try to be wise about the way the world works. But at the same time . . . find some way to turn those insights about what's real and what's true into some creative process, creative action. That's what we try to pass on to our audience so [they] don't feel powerless.

AND WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THOSE WHO FEEL HELPLESS AND POWERLESS?: I'm always fighting against that feeling of helplessness. I can be overwhelmed by ambivalence, by the despair of the day. [But] that's what people use music and film and art for; that's its purpose.

WHAT IS THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF A SOUL PERFORMANCE?: Its purpose is to pull you up out of that despair, to shine a light on new possibilities. . . . That's where the living is, that's where life is. Regardless of what's going on externally, those are the powers that you [must] find within yourself to keep going and change things. To try to make some place for yourself in the world.⁵¹

Springsteen's understanding of the performer/audience relationship now can be mapped onto my theorization of soul. First, he is acutely aware of the interdependence of his role and his audience's needs, and thus of the necessity of creating a certain kind of resonance (a "socio-religious consciousness") such that his work can fulfill "its purpose" as liberating testimony. Second, his *own* fight against helplessness and ambivalence is necessary for the audience to accept *he* has found wisdom through suffering; only then can he act as a conduit of the audience's needs. Third, his belief in affirmation lies in the struggle between external accommodation and internal regeneration, and thus life itself—in fact, *self* itself—is a dialectic between despair and "shin[ing] a light on new possibilities." These are all theomusicological ideals of which Springsteen has been at least partly self-aware since the mid-seventies. He explained his relationship then in similar terms: "If you want an audience—you gotta go out and get it. . . . You better go work for it. That's what I'm interested in."⁵²

As mentioned earlier, Springsteen's songs and concerts also partake of the passion and symbolism of Catholicism, even if he has always mocked its oppressive and repressive tenets. "I could never get that redemption stuff out of my work or out of myself," he told an audience in 2004, "it's there to stay."⁵³ Moreover, his concerts have often been experienced—and analyzed—as a communal quasi-religious experience. The journalist Eric Alterman wrote a painfully sincere book-length fan letter to Springsteen in which he compared his experience of "spiritual epiphany in the company of [a] religious community" at a Springsteen concert to the Kol Nidre service of Yom Kippur in Judaism. In *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*, Daniel Cavicchi grafts a sociological method onto the Geertzian interpretive model to analyze Springsteen

fandom, and in particular, the ritual preparation, immersion, and experience of his concerts.⁵⁴

In "Baptism by Bruce," forty-year-old music critic Jim Walsh summed up twenty years of Springsteen's live shows. "Nobody has ever knocked me out, picked me back up, given me a shot in the arm, broke my heart and resuscitated it, all in the span of the same three hours, the way he has, and did [that night] again." Walsh here captures the combination of sympathetic vibration, affirmation, rejuvenation, and redemption that Springsteen synthesized from James Brown and Catholicism. At nineteen, Walsh had "never witnessed anything so raw or so exuberant [as a Springsteen concert], and I couldn't articulate what it had done to me." Yet the performance did not make Walsh think about fame or fantasy or visions of escape, common enough responses to rock-and-roll shows; instead, "Springsteen's music demands that you think about your own [life]." Springsteen provided Walsh "with a road map to manhood, and gave me permission to be both saint and sinner."⁵⁵

The tension in Springsteen's work between the soul ritual and Catholicism finds an apt set of images in the song "Open All Night." Driving towards his girlfriend in the middle of the night, the narrator runs out of spiritual fuel:

The radio's jammed up
with gospel stations
Lost souls callin'
[for] long distance salvation.

A "gospel station" will offer reward in the hereafter or clichés about patience in the face of suffering. The narrator wants his quasi-religious *music* ritual instead and, in a nice lyrical touch, prays for one:

Hey, mister deejay,
won't cha hear my last prayer . . .
Hey, ho, rock'n'roll,
deliver me from nowhere.

It's that "shout for freedom" the driver needs—to rejuvenate, to stay on the road, to get where he's going, to be "deliver[ed] from nowhere" to somewhere.

Springsteen has enough perspective to joke about these specific tensions of performer and audience, priest and flock, shaman and communal ritual. He has, for example, singled out Bono as a fellow spirit:

Shaman, shyster, one of the greatest and most endearingly naked
messianic complexes in rock and roll. . . . It takes one to know one, of
course. You see, every good Irish and Italian-Irish front-man *knows*
that before James Brown there was Jesus. . . . [W]e are not ironists. We

are creations of the heart and of the earth and of the stations of the cross [my italics].⁵⁶

Postmodernist scholars might mock Springsteen's pretensions to authenticity here—his sincere invoking of such terms as “heart,” “earth,” and religion—as if these rhetorical pretensions are either a commercial ploy or a sign of his intellectual naivete.⁵⁷ I am suggesting instead that neither Springsteen nor his critics understand the precepts of his musical forebears. One must, however, give him credit for confessing what “every good . . . [white ethnic] frontman knows”: “that before James Brown there was Jesus.” It would be hard to imagine a more concise description of the sacred/secular crossroads in (African) American music.

Now we turn to the crucible of soul—the concert performance—to see how Springsteen works within the tradition. In these analyses of Springsteen's soul ritual in both “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” and “Land of Hope and Dreams,” I am less interested in any intentionality on Springsteen's part than in mapping his performance onto the gospel impulse as it became secularized in the soul tradition. The following close readings are taken from the CD, *Live in New York City* (2001), and can be checked against slightly different versions on the DVD, *Live in New York City* (2001).

The Soul Ritual: “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” (2001)

The centerpiece of Springsteen's 1999–2000 reunion tour with the E Street Band—they had not toured for a decade—was a sixteen-minute version of “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out.” The song was an odd choice since it valorizes Clarence Clemons's role in the band and yet the saxophone has been a marginalized musical element of Springsteen's sound for a generation. From 1974 to 1985, Springsteen wrote songs that climaxed with soulful saxophone solos (e.g., “Jungleland,” “Prove It All Night,” “Independence Day”); Clemons was then central to the band's sound, and the E Street band remained a loose, jamming unit with jazz and funk aspirations. In that period, Springsteen was as likely to bust out with a cover of Smokey Robinson's “Mickey's Monkey” or Wilson Pickett's “In the Midnight Hour” as Buddy Holly's “Not Fade Away” or Creedence Clearwater Revival's “Who'll Stop the Rain.” But for nearly a generation, Clemons has had little to do on stage but play a few rote solos, slap a tambourine, and perform African American authenticity.

As recorded on *Born to Run* (1975), “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” is an upbeat, horns-spiked R&B song about an alienated kid in New York City and how he is *saved*—in every sense of that term—by the formation of his rock band. The song mythologizes the Huck-and-Jim friendship of Springsteen (“Bad Scooter”) and Clemons (“the Big Man”), and suggests

the latter solved the former's existential crisis. More than any other song on the album, "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out" feeds the iconography of the album cover of *Born to Run*, with Springsteen joyfully leaning on Clemmons's broad shoulders as he stares the world down.⁵⁸ The song begins with Bad Scooter walking in New York City, "searching for his groove." He is on the verge of desperation—"I got my back to the wall"—and bemoans his state of being "stranded in the jungle / taking all the heat they was giving." He's no flaneur, however, but rather on a quest—"Bad Scooter[s] searching for his groove"—only he continually encounters sonic fields of negativity ("freeze-outs") on the city streets. The crisis ends when "the change was [is] made uptown / and the Big Man joined the band."

At the 2000 concert, Springsteen and the E Street Band begin with a straight reading of the first two verses. Three minutes into the song, the band relaxes into a one-chord vamp akin to the background groove of a gospel service just before the preacher takes the stage. The exit line is significant, as it emphasizes Bad Scooter's quasi-religious alienation: "And I'm all alone / I'm all a-lone," Springsteen sings, "and I'm on-n-n my own, / I'm on my own / . . . and I can't / *find* / my way / back home now." According to the lyrics, Springsteen needs the band to cure his lack of community; according to the dictates of the soul ritual, he must dramatize this feeling authentically such that individual audience members leave the concert *feeling* less alone.

Now let the ritual begin with call-and-response. "It's all right," Springsteen calls twice, and the audience responds in kind. Then he inflects it slightly, "Yes, it's all right" he sings twice, and they sing it back that way. Then he names the experience to be validated: "it's all right / to have a good time." In each case, the audience sings back the lines in unison and in his cadences, on key and in tune; that is, he does not solicit their response. Springsteen is one of the few Euro-American performers whose audience reacts instantaneously to his vocal cues and body language.

Springsteen next invokes an image common to both the Bible and the soul canon: "take me to the river," he references Al Green's 1971 classic, "wash me in the water." This is a request to the audience for assistance in the healing process; Springsteen repeats it four times with Clemmons popping a tambourine—gospel-style—in support. The other band members all join him for the first affirmation, in which four "yeahs" builds via crescendos: "I said Yeah . . . Yeah . . . Yeah . . . YEAH!," then one beat of rest, "take me to the river tonight." The band repeats it three more times and then holds onto the last "Yeah," allowing the crowd's roar to rise up around the sustained chord for fifteen seconds, creating musical and dramatic tension. In that upswelling, Springsteen lets out an expressive but inarticulate yell ("yeeeeee—eee-eee-eee-eeeeeeee") that musicologists

call a "vocal"; it is common to "African-American calls and cries," as well as to the exhortations of African American preachers.⁵⁹ Then Springsteen releases it and repeats one final time: "*take me to the river tonight.*"

That one line is tonight's soul text and now comes the explication. Springsteen first riffs on *the river* as a polyvalent symbol for the poor sinner: he employs it both to confess his own hopelessness and to solicit eventual redemption through a supportive community. "That's right," Springsteen shifts register into a hoarse, quasi-evangelical voice,

That's where I want to go tonight—
I want to go to that riverside.

The soul artist narrates a journey upon which others can emotionally piggyback, so Springsteen employs melisma to ramp up the exhortatory qualities of his soul sermon.

I want to find[-d-d-d-d] that river of life;
I want to find[-d-d-d-d] that river of love;
I want to find[-d-d-d-d] that river of faith . . .
and that river of hope.

He *wants* to find it and cannot by himself; the audience must take him to the river.

Having established the sacred through one soul singer, he now affirms the secular through another, Marvin Gaye.

Tonight I want to go to that river of sexual healing
and companionship.
I want to find that river of joy
and that river of happiness.

In referencing Gaye's "Sexual Healing" (1982) in conjunction with "joy" and "happiness," Springsteen equates sexuality with pleasure, not sin. At this point, the audience fails to provide sufficient resonance for Springsteen's navigation of the secular/sacred crossroads because he suddenly cries out, "*I'm not bullshitting back here,*" challenging them to follow his narrative line.

There is a pregnant pause, and Springsteen decides to explain the nature of his work and the function of his band.

And that's why we're here night after night
after night after night—
Because you can't get to those things by yourself.
You got to have help.

We're now back to the theme of "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out." What

the E Street band did for Bad Scooter, Springsteen *and* the E Street Band will do for the audience.

[Because] That's where *I* want to go tonight [to the river] . . .
and I want you to go with me.
*Because I need—
to go with you.*

The soul artist is a fellow weak sinner on the path but the first among equals in this arena. He is point-man for emotional and survival management and the vehicle of secular transcendence. "That's why I'm here," Springsteen declares. In other words, *that is the true nature of my line of work.*

In seven minutes, Springsteen reveals his mastery of the soul repertoire: repetition, invocation, call-and-response, socioreligious consciousness, the sacred/secular crossroads, liberation theology, his signature version of the rock-and-soul ritual. He can now firmly declare his objectives, invoking democratic inclusion (and the secular) with a parodic, self-mocking overlay:

And tonight I want to throw a rock'n'roll *ex-or-r-cism!*
A rock'n'roll *bap-tism!*
And a rock'n'roll bar *mitzvah*
That's right—we're gonna do it all tonight . . .
Everything right here.

Springsteen now updates one of his classic bardic stories, those rock sermons that can be seen as the precedent for his contemporary rock-and-soul ritual. As mentioned above, in the seventies Springsteen often told fifteen-minute anecdotes that mythologized his calling; often during the song "Growin' Up" (aptly enough), Springsteen told a story about asking either God (sacred) or a gypsy woman (secular) for supernatural guidance. In the latter formula, the E Street Band's car breaks down at midnight in the woods and they stumble on a gypsy woman's shack. She decides to grant Springsteen one wish—that he will succeed at his calling—and then asks after his aspirations. Springsteen would tease the audience, "I think I wanna be . . . I think I wanna be . . . I think I wanna be," and then, triumphantly, "a rock'n'roll *star.*" After the punchline, the band would kick in at full volume as if to prove the rightness—and righteousness—of Springsteen's choice. (In fact, "the gypsy woman" is a trope of the sacred/secular crossroads, as in the opening lines of Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters' "Hoochie Coochie Man.")⁶⁰

For the reunion tour, Springsteen updated this piece of E-Street lore and illuminated his newfound understanding of the sacred/secular crossroads. Ten seconds after the levity of calling for a rock-and-roll

exorcism/ baptism/ bar mitzvah, Springsteen settles back into the soul ritual, representing himself once again as a poor pilgrim on the road.

I want them waters to fall down on me
and set me free
And set you free.

Springsteen begins to pace with his head cast down, and remembers being a young man "paralyzed by my own fears" on a night when he stood "before a dark grove of trees." He was afraid "to pass through" the forest, "even though I knew that on the other side *the river of life* was waiting." A gypsy woman appears; she asks what he does for a living. "So I told her," is all he says in 2000 about being a rock-and-soul man, and she gives him ten words of advice: "What you need is a band. You need some help."

Springsteen then suddenly ditches his humility for the voice of a circus barker, and launches into his famously grandiloquent band introductions. "*And that is why it is my pleasure to introduce to you* on piano, Roy Bittan . . . the secretary of intelligence. . . . the Dean of the university of musical perversity." It's time to give each member of the E Street Band an honorary title in Reverend Springsteen's Soul Ministry. His guitarist and childhood friend Steven Van Zandt is "the minister of faith and . . . keeper of all that is righteous on E Street." He serenades his wife (and back-up singer) Patti Scialfa with the graphically erotic "Red-Headed Woman"—a song with references to intercourse and cunnilingus—and the audience becomes a congregation of back-up singers chanting those three words while Springsteen improvises a soul-singer's romantic quest: "I'm searching for my baby (red headed woman) / I'm begging baby, please (red headed woman) / I'm down upon my knees (red headed woman) / in supplication (read headed woman) / in sexification / in the love education." Bringing together sex and prayer, the secular and the sacred, the domestic and the political, Springsteen dubs his wife "the First Lady of love."

Clarence Clemons is introduced "last but not least," and the noise level triples. Why is this marginal musical element of the concert performance so important? Because he is, as Springsteen now shouts, "The Minister of Soul" (also "the Secretary of the Brotherhood"). Springsteen screams out twice, "Do I have to say his name?" The audience yells, "No." He then gestures hand to ear while the audience yells "Cla-rence," and Springsteen asks, "Say who?"; "Cla-rence," they answer, and again he yells back, "Say who?" This call and response goes on *nine more times*, each time the crowd screaming back in cadence, "Cla-rence." It is a disturbing fetishization of blackness as it reflects both upon Springsteen and his white audience.

Springsteen himself never mentions Clemons by name, and in terms of

the narrative structure of the soul ritual, the next move is brilliant. After the eleventh call-and-response ("Say *who?*" / "Cla-rence"), the musicians modulate out of the two-chord vamp they've been in this whole time, resolve the seventh-chord musical tension they've set up, and the band re-enters "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out" at exactly the point they left it nine minutes earlier. The next verse celebrates the moment Clemons ("The Big Man") joins the band and consequently, there is great happiness in the land.

When the change was made uptown
and the Big Man joined the band.
From the coastline to the city,
All the little pretties waved their hand.

Now if we were all paying attention, this was the night when Springsteen found help, support, freedom, and soul integration. This was the night he took the gypsy's woman advice, found a band to help him out, learned of a ritual to affirm life and calling, and secured a broad black shoulder to lean on. This was the night he went down to his soul's (metaphorical) river, and there found healing and mystic communion. So now Springsteen can finish the song: he *got* help back then; he found his band.

There's even musical symmetry to the close of the sermon section of the ritual. Just as he had opened it with a call-and-response of "it's all right," Springsteen now calls out "it's all right" to the band—not the audience—and they respond "it's all right" *ten times*. Then Clemons solos for the first time. Springsteen asks the audience to "say 'it's all right now,'" and they do; he's trolling to see if the soul ritual has succeeded. As a final honor to those who "gave him help," Springsteen bestows upon the band a part-soul, part-evangelical, parting tribute: "The E Street band," he shouts twice in the manner of an old-school soul revue MC, "the heart-stopping, earth-shocking, earth-quaking, heart-breaking, air-conditioner-shaking, history-making, legendary . . . E. . . . Street. . . . band!"

And yet we're still not quite finished. Springsteen turns to drummer Max Weinberg, shouts "Yeah" *fourteen times*, and each time Weinberg hits the same drum figure in response while Clemons holds one soulful note the whole time. How does the ritual finally end? As the band plays its last percussive flourishes, Springsteen shouts into the mix, "Say amen, somebody."

"This Train" Powers Springsteen's Soul Train

With "Tenth-Avenue Freeze Out," Springsteen rereads his youthful survival as soul ritual. During the same tour he debuted a song to be understood as his contemporary mythic vision of national renewal, "Land

of Hope and Dreams" (1999). For "Land," Springsteen appropriates the dominant African American metaphor of the train, with all its freighted history, memory, mobility, excitement, and blues-drenched musical onomatopoeia. He envisions such a land as a secularized Canaan that is only a train ride away, so long as we—any given audience on any given night—are willing to work when we arrive there in the promised land.

Its central image is the train to glory, "big wheels rolling through fields" leading to "a land of hope and dreams." This image was established in the nineteenth-century spiritual, "The Gospel Train," and crossed over into popular song in Sister Rosetta Tharpe's hit, "This Train" (1939), where she repeated the phrase "this train" in each line, making it the call, to which the description of the passengers—one line at a time—becomes the response. For more than a century, this song has been sung by mothers to children throughout the African diaspora—Bob Marley recorded a version in the 1960s as an homage to his mother—and it is the impetus (and subtext) behind hits as diverse as Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready (There's a Train to Jordan)," The O'Jays' "Love Train," and Rufus Thomas's soul classic, "The Memphis Train." With Tharpe's version as a template, Springsteen and the E Street Band repeat the phrase "this train" sixteen times in verses five and six of "Land of Hope and Dreams," and "this train"—on which "faith will be rewarded"—becomes "the call" of the congregation over which Springsteen hoarsely screams his vision.⁶¹

Tharpe's gospel train—like the chariot, its predecessor—is a sacralized vehicle and carries only the pious. Tharpe's train "is a-bound for glory / if you ride on it, you must be holy"; Tharpe's train "don't carry no gamblers / [no] two-bit whores an' midnight ramblers." In contrast, Springsteen's soul train is secular, and *all* listeners are invited to board. His soul train *specifically* carries "whores and gamblers . . . [and] carries midnight ramblers." Springsteen implores his listeners to "meet me / in the land of hope and dreams," then narrates the train-ride everyone must take to reach an earthly democratic utopia. It begins when you "grab your ticket and your suitcase" to catch a ride on "[the] thunder [that's] rolling down the tracks." And where does it end?: "You don't know where you're goin' / but you know you won't be back."

Springsteen's soul train has roots in various African American songs, but again the clear model—and clear precedent—is James Brown. In his recording of "Night Train" (1961), Brown stripped soul's collective American dream down to its bare musical bones over a jump-blues groove. But as performed *live* the following year on the enormously influential *Live at the Apollo* (1962), Brown reimaged the song and its groove, and this version clearly inspired Springsteen in four ways: (1) musically, it's both swinging and propulsive, a joyous, revolutionary near-polyrhythmic polished shuffle rhythm punctuated by horn-section riffs mimicking

train whistles; (2) metaphorically, it has a powerful forward drive, as it represents an express train on the move; (3) Brown is the conductor and calls out to people all down the line, "all a-BOARD . . . the night train" ("Atlanta, Georgia," shuffle shuffle, shuffle shuffle, "all A-Board(!), Raleigh, North Carolina," blasting horns mimic train-whistle sonorities, "all A-Board(!). . . Washington, D.C. . . Baltimore, Maryland"); (4) Brown here boils down the sacred/secular crossroads to this one trope, as he asks every audience to "take me home!" or "carry me home." Whether a listener or audience member reads "home" as Heaven, the city, his or her hometown, or the promised land depends on any given individual's ritual needs.

As a text for the soul ritual, "Night Train" unifies performer and audience on a fast-moving musical vehicle that keeps alienation, loneliness, and the blue devils at bay, speeding through the night and creating biomusicological bonding. In "Night Train," Brown calls African Americans onto the main line and asks them to carry him home *in return* for carrying them to a better place, or at least a happier state of mind. "Night Train" recalls, resonates, and resounds with everything from the myth of John Henry to "Take the A Train," while also picking up the locomotive onomatopoeia of big bands and gospel quartets and blueswomen leaving their mean mistreatin' men. Historically, in African American "musicking" (to use Christopher Small's term), the train has been the primordial metaphor and sonic system.⁶²

At the turn of the 1980s, when Springsteen was the hardest working man in the *rock-and-roll* business—and at a time when his debt to Brown was clearest—he stole "Night Train," hook, ritual, and theater.⁶³ At the end of his marathon four-hour concerts of the late seventies, Springsteen sometimes pulled the core of the E Street band to his side and "[p]ointed] to the farthest reaches of whatever arena they happened to be playing . . . and say, 'I have a vision. I see . . . a train.'" While the band sustained the chugga-chugga rhythm underneath, Springsteen sang over it, "I see a train, coming down the line, train train train, coming down the line"—evoking not only Elvis Presley's version of "Mystery Train" and Brown's "Night Train," but also "The Wabash Cannonball" and the role of the train in "musical modernity."⁶⁴ Then he would repeat this line, pumping his arm in time until the audience caught on—" [he] would chant 'woo-woo' in rhythm," Marsh recalled. Back and forth it would go, call-and-response, Springsteen yelling "All a-board!", the audience singing back "woo-woo." Just like Brown in "Night Train," Springsteen would then name American cities, usually according to the tour's itinerary—"Ann Arbor, Michigan. All Aboard! . . . Oakland, California. All aboard!"—with the audience chanting "woo-woo" at each stop. The climax occurred when Springsteen reached the city he was in; the crowd would go crazy when he yelled "Cleveland, Ohio," or wherever he was that night.⁶⁵ For

Dave Marsh, who witnessed this closing ritual several times, "It was . . . everything that he needed to say" in a song "[that] did not have a name . . . [b]ut contained echoes of a dozen songs," and it managed to combine "rhythm and blues and rock and roll and country-western, and inevitably . . . the blues."⁶⁶ Springsteen has used *this* train for a generation: to unite past and present, to validate experience and suffering, to envision a collective American dream musically, rhythmically, and metaphorically.

The repercussions of this past unnamed homage to Brown's "Night Train" connect what was once unarticulated in Springsteen's work to his current self-conscious democratic twist on soul's theomusicology. First, he signifies on the gospel train by accepting all who want to ride: this train "carries fools and kings" along with "the broken-hearted . . . [and] souls departed" (that includes everyone). Second, redemption is implicit on Springsteen's train, but it does not come from God. When Springsteen's rock-and-soul-powered train pulls out of the station, "this train / [its] bells of *freedom* [are] ringing"—train bells, not church bells—and on *this* train, you can "hear the big wheels singing" that drive the "bells of *freedom* [to] ringing." Springsteen reroutes the soul congregation from James Brown's night train, such that in order to carry him home—remember, "because *I* need / to go / with *you*"—the audience will need to go shout for freedom and social justice. If you want to get on board *this* train, Springsteen implies, riders must agree to the following: that all people are created (and are to be treated) equally; that you will practice tolerance; that you desire an end to prejudice and faith-based government. On "this train," with the E Street band holding the phrase, "faith will be rewarded," Springsteen shouts.

In the soul ritual, "faith" is neither dogmatic nor sectarian—it is the sacralized secular, liberation theology preached at the individual level to encourage self-actualization within a community of purpose. Springsteen's "white" twist on the soul ontology is the vision of a collective American dream marked not by consumption and radical individualism but by participatory democracy and grass-roots social justice. The audience roars in response to "Land of Hope and Dreams"; it is, however, unclear whether their applause represents an endorsement of Springsteen's message or simple appreciation of the song, the spectacle, or simply Springsteen's passion. After all, Euro-American audiences are not raised in the Black Church and do not shout "tell it, tell it," or "yes, that's right," as verbal acclamation for the points of a given sermon.

The Social Artist

For a quarter-century, Springsteen has provided narratives for the deindustrialized dispossessed of the rust belt, and all have drawn upon African American musical models that straddle the sacred/secular crossroads.

For Springsteen, soul bridged the chasm between founding American ideals and African American history and memory; in the survival technology of black music, Springsteen discovered a quasi-religious style of the disinherited that dovetailed with his Catholic upbringing. Springsteen is a social artist working within a soul tradition that partakes of quasi-religious rhetoric since even if transcendence is impossible in modernity, as Gilroy suggests, we retain our desire for its forms and rituals. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, James Cone asserts that “being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.”⁶⁷ Springsteen is not black; he is a rich man and lives like one. But in his art and in performance, his heart, soul, mind, and body are with the dispossessed in their demands for the United States to make good on its founding rhetoric.

I mean that latter statement to be taken literally. Springsteen publicly endorsed a political candidate for the first time in 2004 (John Kerry)—he was roundly criticized for it within his fan-base—and then headlined the Vote for Change tour.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in an op-ed article in the *New York Times*, a posting to his own website, and in widely publicized comments from the Vote for Change concerts, Springsteen made a pitch for collective change through individual contributions to social justice that stands as a literal and political analogue to the metaphorical soul utopia he conducts his musical passengers toward in “Land of Hope and Dreams”.⁶⁹

We remain a land of great promise but we need to move America towards the fulfillment of the promises that she has made; economic justice, civil rights, protection of the environment, a living wage, respect for others, and humility in exercising our power at home and around the world. These are not impossible ideals[;] they are achievable goals with a strong leadership and the will of a vigilant and informed American people.

[I]t is in seeking her [America’s] truths, both the good, and the bad, [that] we find a deeper patriotism, a more authentic experience as citizens, and we find the power that is embedded only in truth to change our world for the better. *That is how our soul as a nation and as a people is revealed.*

So . . . [i]f you share our concerns[,] find the best way to express yourself, roll up your sleeves and do it.⁷⁰

Many scholars would no doubt dismiss such rhetoric as Springsteen’s performance of naive populism or blue-collar authenticity. But in many ways, this is liberation theology: it is a quasi-religious prayer for the strength to battle secular “evils” through personal and collective struggle. Springsteen gives voice to the audience’s suffering and cynicism, yet

affirms the possibility of transcendence—in this case, to an audience seeking renewed faith in the political process.

Springsteen's soul theology is his own blend of liberation theology, Catholicism, American populism, existentialism, and Afro-Christianity, with clear precedents in blues, R&B, soul, country, and various folk musics. He convincingly embodies suffering through the expressive quality of voice, body, and song such that individuals in the audience feel their experiences are validated and their spirits rejuvenated.⁷¹

To nod toward Susan McClary's challenge, I am claiming here that African American soul practices floated freely in American music for a generation and provided Springsteen with the philosophical underpinnings of what would become his stage sermons, existential affirmations, and exhortations toward personal, social, and spiritual change. Springsteen absorbed the ontology of liberation theology and learned its concepts—the sacred/secular crossroads, the existential affirmations, the ritual of "soul and solidarity"—from the tradition's exemplars. The success of soul between the 1950s and 1970s as a musical genre, as a vessel for secular transcendence, and as a set of emotive resonances depended upon its abstraction in a time of social upheaval. Coming of age in the soul era, Springsteen crossed its ritual over, transforming his faith in *rock-and-roll* to a ritual of *rock-and-soul*.

Springsteen came of age in a society in which African Americans had created a culture of musical practice filled with existential affirmations and performative conventions. Until some lawyer figures out how to sue for copyright infringement regarding a tradition—collective, not individual creation—Springsteen's debt will not matter economically. To be fair, Springsteen's economic success was not built on appropriation of African American forms; unlike Elvis or Eminem, he did not whiteface already-existent genres, such as rhythm-and-blues or hip-hop. The Catholic redemption in his songs was thematically present early in his career, and, of course, musicians, performers, and entertainers of all ethnicities have always stolen from each other, regardless of race, class, gender, or ideology.

In the meantime, as scholars we need to appreciate the complexities of what Samuel Floyd calls "the power of black music." And at some point, Springsteen will need to—at some point, all Americans will need to—acknowledge the survival technology and musical philosophy of the sacred/secular crossroads of *this train*.

Coda: Jazz Fest, 2006

At his already legendary performance at the first post-Katrina Jazzfest in New Orleans on April 30, 2006, Springsteen again revealed his mastery of the soul tradition. "Reverend Springsteen held church and ministered

to a flock," reflected Jazzfest producer Quint Davis. "[I]t was one of the most extraordinary things I've ever seen . . . in 37 years of Jazzfest." Even leading a twenty-piece folk band through songs associated with Pete Seeger, that is, without the E Street Band—Springsteen was able to move an audience in a post-traumatic city. Veteran music critic Randy Lewis of the *Los Angeles Times* checked his objectivity at the door: "Sometime, somewhere, a more dramatic and exhilarating confluence of music with moment may have existed. But in nearly 40 years of concert-going, I haven't witnessed one." Dave Malone of the Radiators, a veteran New Orleans jam band, expected the renditions of Pete Seeger to be "hokey" and "dated." "I didn't expect to be moved like that. . . . I am extremely grateful to have seen that."⁷² Springsteen's performance was national news, and similar descriptions could be found in the *Dallas Morning News*, the *New York Times*, and the *Louisville Courier-Journal* ("Springsteen Expresses New Orleans' Pain"). "In my years working as a music journalist, I have been privy to some great moments, but this was *something more*," underscored a New Jersey journalist. "The healing power of music touched souls and changed lives Sunday afternoon. Without conceit or pontification, Springsteen and his band of healers delivered love and hope not only to those who need it most but to those who realize how good they have it."

Keith Spera, the local music critic for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, chose a moment during Springsteen's song, "My City of Ruins," to depict something akin to socioreligious consciousness. First, Spera quoted the song's lyrics: "'The church door's blown open, / I can hear the organ's song, / but the congregation's gone.'" Then when Springsteen struck the hometown note—"now tell me how do I begin again? My city's in ruins"—Spera described the crowd: "Thousands of New Orleans stood, hushed, letting the moment wash over them and resonate. Those who needed someone to express all the anger, frustration, grief, and resolve expended in the previous eight months had found their man. Fists were raised and tears were shed." Another reporter added: "By the time he sang the chorus, 'Come on rise up!' the audience spontaneously raised their hands in the air, symbolizing the pain and the hope of the city."⁷³ As a New Orleans resident present at this show, I can only say that during "My City of Ruins," it was easy to separate the locals from the tourists: all the locals were crying.

On the second weekend of Jazzfest—the Friday after Springsteen's performance—I was standing beside a sixty-year-old African American woman as she greeted an old friend. "Did you see Springsteen last week?" The man shook his head no. "He tore it up, honey." If soul is about a performer who tells it like it is, who creates a balm for his audiences, who constructively engages the nexus of personal, social, and cultural forces, who convincingly renders his hardscrabble journey

through hard times enabling audiences to look to the future with hope for change—then Bruce Springsteen works in the soul tradition. It's no accident that the centerpiece of his Jazzfest performance was "How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?," or that he wrote three new verses about the post-Katrina experience just for the occasion. Beginning with *The Rising* (2002), then continuing with the song "Devils and Dust" (2005)—about a soldier in Iraq caught between love, duty, fear, and conscience—and now in reimagining an American populist tradition with *The Seeger Sessions*, Springsteen aspires to be the national conscience.⁷⁴

It would be the logical apotheosis of the soul man and the soul ritual. In other words, it would represent Springsteen's soul shamanism made self-aware and socially conscious: that is, to make every concert an act of musical community—equal parts reflection, affirmation, communion, forgiveness, rejuvenation, and empowerment.

NOTES

My thanks to Jeff Cowie and Rob Vanderlan for their insight into earlier drafts of this article.

1. See Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jim Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition* (New York: Perennial, 1998); Larry David Smith, *Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and American Song* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002); Fred Goodman, *Mansion on the Hill: Dylan, Young, Geffen, and Springsteen, and the Head-on Collision of Rock and Commerce* (New York: Crown, 1997).

2. Dave Marsh, *Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 87, 102, 104. Marsh describes "The E Street Shuffle" as "an approximation of Stax Records' version of soul music, with a jaunty brass section and raspy vocal" (104). He also singles out Carter as the force that initially "stabilized the [E Street band] rhythm section," turning it into "one of the most powerful club acts in rock" (102); Bruce Springsteen, *Songs* (New York: Avon, 1998), 23–24.

3. Robert Christgau, *Grown Up All Wrong* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 253.

4. Marsh, *Two Hearts*, xix.

5. Aretha Franklin, quoted in Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green, eds., *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 1; Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 11.

6. Tim Donnelly, "From the Jersey Shore with Love and Hope," *Relix*, Dec. 21, 2005, online edition, www.relix.com; *Bruce Springsteen—VH-1 Storytellers* (Sony, 2005); Gary Graff, *The Ties That Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to E to Z* (Canton, Mich.: Visible Ink, 2005).

7. Bruce Springsteen, "Independence Day," Stockholm, Sweden, May 7, 1981. The full transcription of this introduction is available on the "Storyteller" section of the British website, "Brucebase," <http://www.brucebase.org.uk/stories/070581.htm>. Significantly, one of Springsteen's most confessional songs is entitled "The Promise," and the trope of "the promise" in this monologue connects his individualist American dream—"the promise of a right to a decent life"—to the abstract, collective one he heard in African American voices.

8. Springsteen quoted in Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 86; Springsteen, *Songs*, 43–44; Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 28, 87; see also Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (New York: Plume, 1998), 219–20.

9. Springsteen, *Songs*, 23.

10. I have theorized this concept previously with regard to African American swing-era jazz musicians. See Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African-American Culture Between the World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 105–20, 135–36.

11. Springsteen, quoted in Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 109.

12. Eric Alterman, *It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), 239–40; Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford, 1998). Here's the fifth response Alterman received: "He has opened places in my mind, provided me with music to live my life, given me solace in my grief, provided me with joy for celebrations, introduced me to lifelong friends, raised my blood pressure, increased my heart rate, added smile lines to my face, and made me dance on a folding chair and scream, 'Gooba, gooba, gooba.'"

13. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Zone 6: Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone/MIT Press, 1992), 459.

14. Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), xi.

15. Andrew Greeley, "The Catholic Imagination of Bruce Springsteen," in *Racing in the Street: The Bruce Springsteen Reader*, ed. June Skinner Sawyers (New York: Penguin, 2004), 152, 155, 158, 159, 164, 165; Cullen, *Born in the USA*, 169–71.

16. What singers, musicians, and many African Americans commonly call the "Black Church" comprises many Christian denominations, including Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ, Assemblies of God, African Methodist Episcopal, and various independent churches. See, for example, Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford, 2001), or for a short sketch, Charyn D. Sutton, "The Black Church," <http://www.energizeinc.com/art/apas.html>.

17. A YouTube clip of a recent duet between Springsteen and Sam Moore, "Better to Have and Not Need" (from Moore's *Overnight Sensational* [2006]) granted a rare chance to see a tentative Springsteen, measuring his delivery against a man he seems to consider a soul meistersinger. (The clip has since been deleted.)

18. Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, 29, 220, and on the gospel impulse, 28–31.

20. Sam Moore and Dave Marsh, *Sam and Dave: An Oral History* (New York: Avon, 1998), 47, 52, 65.

21. James Brown, "Public Enemy #1" (1972), from *Star Time* (Polydor 1991; originally recorded on the album, *There It Is* (1972).

22. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (1975; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 169, 229 n. 8, 232; for an extended discussion of the interrelationship of the preacher's call and the audience response, see 16–28. See also Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1972).

23. Jon Michael Spencer, *Re-Searching Black Music* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 37–38, 58–59, 117; Kimberly Rae Connor, *Imagining Grace: Liberating Theologies in the Slave Narrative Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 5, 8, 239–91; "Question of A 'Soulful Style': Interview with Paul Gilroy," in *Soul*, ed. Guillory and Green, 257; Amiri Baraka, quoted in "The Meaning of Bruce," *Spin*, November 1985, 51.

24. Spencer even claims that each African American musical genre (e.g., blues, funk, jazz, hip-hop) represents a distinctive system of thought and consciousness with its own ontology. See Jon Michael Spencer, ed., *Sacred Music of the Secular City: From Blues to Rap* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 1–32.

25. Springsteen, quoted in Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 86, and more recently in Mikal Gilmore, "From Kent State to the White House," *Rolling Stone*, May 18–June 1, 2006, 62.

26. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press), 6, 37, 45.

27. Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (1971; New York: Da Capo, 1981), 126, 127–34; Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 165.

28. See the discussion on the relationship of “hard bop” and “soul jazz” in Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 83–84.

29. Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 63.

30. Cooke originally wrote the song for The Simms Twins, who recorded it in 1961 for his SAR label. Three months later, Cooke recorded a gospel variant of the song, “Lead Me Jesus,” with the Soul Stirrers. Cooke himself recorded “Soothe Me” the following year (1962), and by 1968, it had become a soul standard.

31. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 63–64.

32. Ibid., 23, 63; Jerry Wexler, quoted in the documentary, *The Queen of Soul* (1988); see also Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005).

33. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 8, 26, 229, 233 (J. C. Davis quoted on 231); Jon Michael Spencer, *Re-Searching Black Music* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 85.

34. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 236.

35. Reverend Gardner C. Taylor, *How Shall They Preach* (Elgin, Ill.: Progressive Baptist Publishing, 1977), 27. My thanks to Nick Salvatore for this cite and many other insights with regard to African American preaching. Personal conversation in Ithaca, N.Y., Aug. 5, 2004.

36. Charlie Parker, quoted in Michael Levin and John S. Wilson, “No Bop Roots in Jazz: Charlie Parker,” *Down Beat*, Sept. 9, 1949, 19.

37. Earlston DeSilva, quoted in Spencer, *Re-Searching Black Music*, 83–84; Davis, quoted in Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 243.

38. Moore, quoted in liner notes, *The Very Best of Sam & Dave* (Rhino/WEA, 1995).

39. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949); Lawrence Reddick, “The Negro in the Building of America,” a pamphlet distributed at the fair, 1939–40 New York World’s Fair Collection, Box 366 (Negro Week), New York Public Library collections.

40. According to East Coast music promoter Barry Bell, what distinguished Springsteen from other white performers in the mid-seventies was “the physical aspect of his presentation,” especially how he “use[d] his body to dramatize not just . . . his songs, but every moment of his street life.” Quoted in Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 101, 105–6.

41. Interview with Bruce Springsteen, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, vol. 1 (BBC Video, 2001); Springsteen, *Songs*, 26.

42. For example, he outright stole James Brown’s most famous performance rite. Brown would pretend to faint from exhaustion toward the end of the show and a stretcher would be brought onstage to carry him off. Just before exiting through the curtain, Brown (and later Springsteen) would pick his head up—as if miraculously resurrected by the audience’s love (or need)—and yell, “Can you stand one more?” Werner claims this was Springsteen’s “tribute to James Brown’s impact on . . . [his] performance style.” Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, 221.

43. Lee Rainwater, *Soul* (Boston: Aldine/Transaction, 1970), 5–8; “Lady Soul Tells It Like It Is,” *Time*, June 28, 1968, 1.

44. B. B. King, *Blues All Around Me* (New York: Avon, 1996), 212–13.

45. Although King and Bland are blues singers, Keil called it a “soul” ritual; in his theorization, performative conventions of performer and audience are shared between blues, rhythm and blues, and soul.

46. Keil, *Urban Blues*, 164–90.
47. “Question of a ‘Soulful Style,’” 250–52, 259–60.
48. *Ibid.*, 260.
49. Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t*, 330–31; Coleman quoted in Sidran, *Black Talk*, 127.
50. This quote is common and it is hard to trace Springsteen’s first such pronouncement; see, for example, a concert review by Caine O’Rear, “Lucky Town,” www.richmond.com, Oct. 25, 2005.
51. Ken Tucker, “Bruce Springsteen: The Interview,” *Entertainment Weekly*, Feb. 28, 2003, online edition, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,425167,00.html>.
52. Interview with Springsteen, *Old Grey Whistle Test*.
53. Springsteen quoted from a live recording given as a benefit for *Double Take* magazine, Somerville, Mass., Feb. 19, 2003.
54. Alterman, *It Ain’t No Sin*, 113–15; Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us*, 22–37.
55. Jim Walsh, “Baptism by Bruce,” in *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2000*, ed. Peter Guralnick (New York: Da Capo, 2000), 421–25.
56. “Bruce Springsteen Inducts U2 into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame,” March 17, 2005, as printed in full on U2’s official website, <http://www.atu2.com/news/article.src?ID=3790&Key=&Year=>.
57. See, for example, Simon Frith, “The Real Thing—Bruce Springsteen,” in *Racing in the Street*, ed. Sawyers, 130–39.
58. The cover was an important factor in the album’s success. In assessing its relationship to the music inside, *Rolling Stone* called it “[an] iconic cover photo . . . a perfect metaphor for Springsteen’s brotherly reliance on the E Street Band.” Only Springsteen and Clemons were called to the photo shoot, however, turning the black saxophonist into a metonym for not only brotherhood but racial brotherhood, or soul solidarity. “The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, Dec. 11, 2003, 96; Eric Meola, *Born to Run: The Unseen Photos* (New York: Insight, 2006), n.p.
59. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 47.
60. “‘The gypsy woman told my mother / before I was born / you got a boy-child comin’ / he’s gonna be a son of a gun.’”
61. See, for example, Gayle Wald, “From Spirituals to Swing: Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Gospel Crossover,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (September 2003): 387–416.
62. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), passim; Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine*, 63–104; Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).
63. For example, in 1982 Springsteen wrote and recorded “The Big Payback,” an homage to Brown’s hit song and album, “The Payback” (1974).
64. Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine*, 63–104.
65. Springsteen used to perform “I Hear a Train” as tacked onto the end of his concert finale known as the “Detroit Medley.” According to an unofficial website, he first played it on the 1980–81 tour on September 10, 1980, in Cobo Hall, Detroit, Michigan. This was the same tour on which he paid respects to Smokey Robinson and The Drifters. <http://www.brucebase.org.uk/gig1979.htm#0g>
66. Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 237–38.
67. Cone quoted in Connor, *Imagining Grace*, 15–16.
68. For criticism of Springsteen’s stand, see, for example, “Readers to Rockers: Just Shut Up and Play!,” *Chicago-Sun-Times*, Oct. 10, 2004, 10.
69. Bruce Springsteen, “Chords for Change,” *New York Times*, Aug. 5, 2004, 25; David Corn, “Springsteen for Change,” *The Nation*, Oct. 25, 2004, 3.
70. “National Anthem (Vote for Change finale concert) to Rebroadcast on Sundance Channel,” www.noted.blogs.com/westcoastmusic/2004/10/national_anthem.html, Oct. 29, 2004, italics added. This is taken from a full transcript of Springsteen’s comments on

the final Vote for Change concert; however, variations of these comments can be found on several websites—truthout.org, salon.com, commondreams.org, etc.—between August and October 2004. See also Springsteen, “Chords for Change.”

71. Of Springsteen’s final set at the Vote for Change concerts, Jon Pareles noted that it “summed up the concert” with its songs “about ordinary people who were bruised but not beaten.” Jon Pareles, “Guitars and Amps: Campaign Tools,” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2004, E1.

72. Keith Spera, “How the Fest Was Won,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 13, 2006, C1, C4.

73. The song owes a certain debt to Bobby Blue Bland’s “With These Hands (Small but Mighty)” (1959), in which Bland shifts an image of hands folded in prayer to hands creating miracles in service of romantic love (“with these hands / oh, Lord / I can work miracles”).

74. Spera, “How the Fest Was Won”; Thor Christensen, “Springsteen Shares Tailor-Made Tunes with New Orleans,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 30, 2006, online edition; Nekesa Mumbi Moody, “Springsteen Expresses New Orleans’ Pain,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 1, 2006, online edition.