

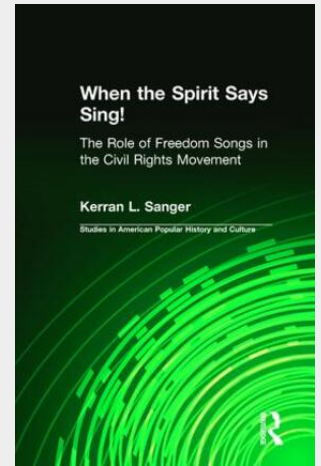
Sanger

## When the Spirit Says Sing!

The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s, such songs as We Shall Overcome, Keep Your Eyes on the Prize, and Do What the Spirit Says Do were sung at virtually every mass meeting, demonstration, and planning session of Civil Rights activists. They were sung on the Freedom Rides, during the marches, and in jail cells of the South. Movement activists have commented frequently and eloquently on the ways that singing and songs gave them strength and a sense of self. This study offers a close analysis of the lyrics of the songs most central to the Civil Rights Movement, with an eye to understanding the songs as self-persuasion. In the songs, the activists defined themselves and their world, and reinforced a plan of action for their participation in the Movement. This analysis of the freedom songs is set in the context of Movement history and supported with commentary from activists and background information on Movement activities. In addition, this study offers readers insights into the moving and inspiring power of the freedom songs.



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