

Roots of the Blues



Field Hollers

- Developed in the cotton and rice fields during slavery.
- Call and Response
 - One person sings/shouts a phrase, and a group of people will respond with the same phrase or a variation.
 - A respected slave would make the “call”

Field Hollers cont.

- The type of work would determine the tempo (speed) of the song.
- Africans would sing about things that reminded them of Africa.
- African Americans would sing about the hardships of their lives.
- Slave owners wanted their slaves to sing.
 - They thought singing made slaves happy and more productive.

Characteristics of Field Hollers

- Call and Response
- Slurs, moans, and cries
- Percussive sounds
 - Drums were banned



Work Songs

- Used while completing a boring, repetitive task.
 - Used to reduce boredom
- The songs helped everyone in the group synchronize their movements.
- Used by slaves, free African Americans, and Chain Gangs.
 - Working prisoners with little to no pay, chained together to prevent escape.

Characteristics of Work Songs

- Often sung with jobs that required tools.
 - Axe, shovel, hammer
- Improvisation
 - Making a song up on the spot without any written music.



Spirituals

- Similar to field hollers and work songs.
 - Difference: Spirituals sang about Christianity.
- Spirituals used stories from the Bible as metaphors for a better life.
- Sung after church services.
- Sometimes had secret meanings
 - Running Away, Secret Meetings

Spirituals cont.

- Sacred music
 - Music about religious things.
- Secular music
 - Music about everything else.
- Spiritual Characteristics
 - Sacred songs
 - Secret meanings