



Winter 1-16-2003

## Music Integral to Civil Rights Movement

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### **Recommended Citation**

Hanna, Jeff, "Music Integral to Civil Rights Movement" (2003). *News and Events*. 5445.  
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January 16, 2003

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## *Music Integral to Civil Rights Movement*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. —The role that music played in the direction that the civil rights movement took in the 1950s and 1960s can never be overstated, says Carren Moham, assistant professor of voice at Illinois Wesleyan University.

"Music was not only an integral part of the movement, but the kind of music made a particular difference," says Moham. "As you look at some of the spirituals that were among Dr. (Martin Luther) King's favorites, you see that they were designed to get people emotionally and spiritually charged but never in a destructive way."

In addition to "We Shall Overcome," which is said to have derived from a spiritual known either as "I'll Overcome Some Day" or "I'll Be All Right," Moham cites "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Steal Away to Jesus" as among those songs that King often chose. "He obviously selected music that would stir passion, but always in a positive way," she says.

The spirituals were originally a means of communication among slaves, often used to send messages from plantation to plantation. "Although the songs might have appeared innocuous, music had specific purposes. As you consider the lyrics, you can hear slaves telling one another about future events," she says. "Just as music was used for both communication and inspiration among slaves, the civil rights movement had the same purposes when it adopted many of those same spirituals as its anthems."

Moham says that it is impossible to imagine the civil rights movement apart from its music. "When you watch video of those marches and rallies, you are drawn to the rhythms of the music, the notion of how different those events would have been without the music," she says.

Moham is a gifted soprano who has sung with many symphony orchestras, among them, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra and the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra. In addition, she has done extensive research on the virtually unknown and unpublished art songs of African-American composers. This research led her to devise two concert series entitled "Songs by African-American Women."

She will be joined by Illinois Wesleyan students for "A Festival of Spirituals" on Wednesday, January 22, at 11 a.m. and Sunday, January 26, at 3 p.m. in Evelyn Chapel on the University's campus.

To arrange an interview with Moham, contact Jeff Hanna or Ann Aubry at 309/556-3181.