

Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction 3/e

Sample Essay for Chapter 9

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The Sanctified Church, which **included** a number of **Black Baptist and Pentecostal churches**, provided not only a safe space in which members could worship and socialize, but also proved to be a powerful means by which church members received messages of hope as well as direction to take **social action**. In the 1920s, most of the **preachers were male**, and they used the pulpit to reach their congregants as they proclaimed the gospel. Preachers sometimes **left the pulpit** to address large numbers of people in **public spaces**. An excellent example is found in **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, who inspired countless people with his gospel messages, delivered in an engaging, almost musical way that drew attention to his call to **peaceful protest**.

Women were not often found behind the pulpit in the 1920s, but that does not mean that they did not send forth inspiring messages of their own. As **active musicians** within their congregations, women sang **messages of hope through gospel songs**, a genre that emerged in urban churches in the early 20th

century. Like the preachers of their congregations, many women **took their messages to the streets**, both entertaining the masses and delivering important social communication. Gospel lyrics, in much the same manner as the spirituals that preceded them, frequently used **metaphoric language** that served to comment on or instruct others regarding social matters. **Therefore**, a song like “Wade in the Water” carried **not only a spiritual message**, but also ideas about how to persevere through difficult times.

The popularity of the gospel sound, as well as the captivating preaching style, engaged a **large number of Americans who accessed the preaching and the music via recordings, radio, and later on television**. Even today, the church remains a center of community and activism where Black women and men continue in strong leadership roles.