

# Soulful Songs and Stories

**With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth.**



Hi *Soulful Song* Lovers and *Story Tellers*,

This is the 15th of the Friday emails that we're sending out or posting on the webpage about songs, stories, storytelling, community, or personal/spiritual growth. In July, we anticipate that all 15 of these PDFs will be posted on the webpage, [www.j.mp/uucsr-sss](http://www.j.mp/uucsr-sss).

This week we're going to look at *Soulful Songs and Stories* through the lens of **Black Lives Matter** and the issues of race, diversity, and privilege. There over two dozen musical selections ranging from **Luigi Boccherini to Miles Davis and Ruthie Foster**, and words of wisdom from **Dave Chappelle to Frederick Douglass and Nikky Finney**.

We're going on hiatus for the summer, although we might post a very short song/story combo in mid-July and mid-August, so there's still reason to visit the webpage, or register with Jessica Pond ([Ipond@uucsr.org](mailto:Ipond@uucsr.org)) to get the PDFs emailed to you.

We sorely miss you and your stories. We miss hugs and laughter and coffee/tea with you. We know these mailings are no substitute for meeting face-to-face, but hope that they, in some small way, filled the gap when we were absent one from the other. Although you can now get your hair cut, you still can't go to the US Tennis Open at the end of August (if it's even held), so who knows what safe gathering will look like in September and beyond.

Take the spirit of *Soulful Songs and Stories* with you wherever you go; own your stories, inhabit them, and share them. Be well, do good work, and keep in touch.

Namasté,

*Alice and Steve*

*One way of staying connected over the summer:* Steve sends out a "Great Reads" email every few weeks, summaries of (and links to) great writing that won't put you to sleep, articles mostly about spirit, wonder, joy, justice, and about people being inclusive, fair, and equitable. *If you'd like a sample, send an email to [ClarityAndGrace@gmail.com](mailto:ClarityAndGrace@gmail.com).*

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## Summing Up

We're taking the summer off, as we would if we had been physically meeting. How do we end this 15-week run of Songs and other people's Stories? We could send another quote-filled PDF on Songs. Or Music. Or how much we look forward to seeing you again. Or about the social isolation wrought by COVID-19. Instead, we're going to summarize what we've been talking about in person and via email, through the lens of Black Lives Matter, the 400-year-old elephant in the room.

## Soulful Songs and Stories

What we've been doing from the beginning is telling our stories. *"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."* (Zora Neale Hurston) Because if we don't own our stories, we can't tell them. And if we can't tell our stories, we can't inhabit them, be them. We tell our stories to express our unique combination or personhood and experiences. And we share our stories so other people will know they are not alone. *"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read."* (James Baldwin) At it's best, living your story involves honesty, integrity, vulnerability, wholeness. Sometimes we come to that place voluntarily by excavation to fill a felt void; sometimes it's a gift from seeing, hearing, reading someone who becomes your muse or mentor. Sometimes we are dragged, kicking and screaming, into what really matters by the loss of our health—or the loss of a loved one. And some die an un-lived life with the music still inside them. *"Finding 'The Way,' or getting into 'the Kingdom' is not about cleverness, competence, negotiation, ingenuity, or calculation. It's about openness, vulnerability, and going outside your comfort zone."* (Ken Sehested)

## Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen

Wynton Marsalis Quintet with Lucky Peterson

<https://youtu.be/bBa5HynDByw>

Sam Cooke <https://youtu.be/YEx5pLLTDo>

Paul Robeson <https://youtu.be/pwYpqjVHHmo>

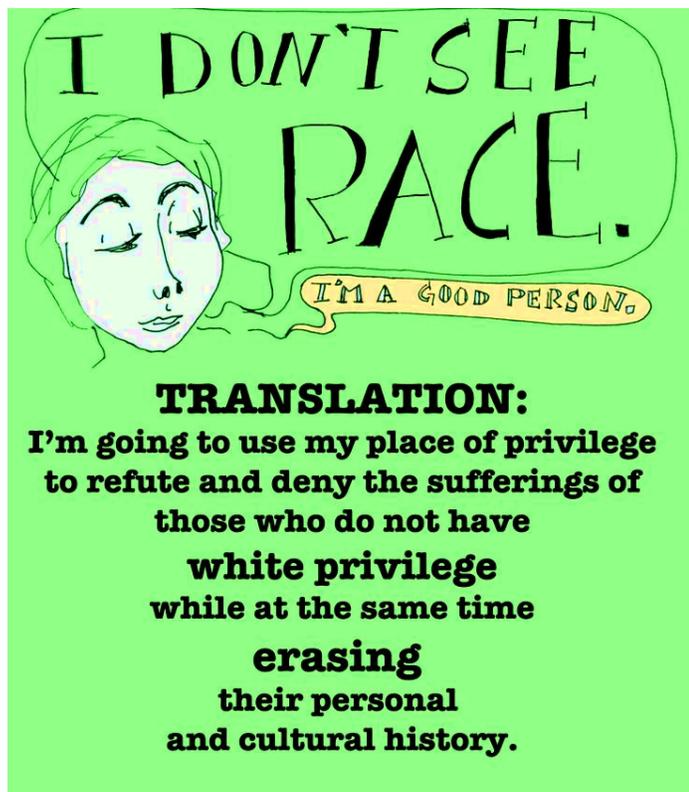
## You are what you eat.

Most of us like to (think we) eat a healthy diet. The two most popular categories of books are cookbooks—and diet books. So, regardless of our intentions, we're eating too much and/or eating too much of the wrong thing. From our very beginning we are fed lies about our worth—because we are women, because we are queer, because we are Black or Brown. Or, thanks to religion, just because we are. We are fed lies in our history books through falsifications, distortions, and omission, and they're perpetuated by mainstream media. We are taught that *"Sex is the most awful, filthy thing on earth, and you should save it for someone you love."* (Butch Hancock) Men are taught they are entitled to women's bodies. Women are taught to be ashamed of everything from breast-feeding to menstruation. However strained this metaphor is, it's instructive: *"There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, 'Morning, boys, how's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, 'What the hell is water?'"* (David Foster Wallace) The most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about.

If you were born in America, you've been swimming in a sea of whiteness since day one. If you're white, that meant you had perks: privilege, power, access, and as much freedom as capitalism would allow. You were fed the myth, that because of your whiteness, you were superior. If you dine on that bullshit, you will get sick. But, *"There is a balm in Gilead/To make the wounded whole/There is a balm in Gilead/To heal the sin-sick soul"* (Jeremiah 8:22; John Newton Olney, 1779) The only way to debase or murder someone we consider "other" is to deny them their humanity. In doing so, we are denying the fullness of our own humanity. There was a story in the *NY Times* decades ago about a rabid anti-Semite, who, upon learning that he had some Jewish ancestry, committed suicide. Loathing the "other" was directed inward.

## There Is a Balm in Gilead

UUCSR Quartet <https://youtu.be/84Q2hqzq-x4>



### You've Got to be Carefully Taught

Sometimes we're taught whiteness by indoctrination, or more usually through osmosis or through the air we breathe. Just as "You've got to be taught / To hate and fear," if all we know is whiteness, we have to be carefully taught about all that is non-white. Having seen *Roots* or *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, or *Oprah*, or *The Green Book* does not qualify. How many of us know of the Rosewood Massacre or the Greenwood Massacre or of Sundown towns or that in 1844 Oregon banned African Americans from the territory altogether? A few of us may live in gated communities, but more of us live in gated communities of the mind. What have you read by a person of color or about the Black diaspora? Recent articles and videos:

- "In the Matter of Black Lives," Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis Sermon 18:41 <https://youtu.be/xoC1pGilyKA?t=1483>
- "An Artist's Guide to Herbs: Wild Lettuce" Harmony Holiday, *Bomb*, Jun 3, 2020 "Black people are the Western world's Christ consciousness." [www.j.mp/harmonyH](http://www.j.mp/harmonyH)
- "8:46," Dave Chappelle ("The 'unrefined' rawness of Dave Chappelle's 8:46 is the source of its greatness" –*WaPo*) Please don't let "N" and "C" words stop you. <https://youtu.be/3tR6mKcBbT4?t=85> 00:26:00
- Jericho Brown and Nikky Finney on Black Lives Matter and Bearing Witness. A visceral conversation about art, identity, and witness. 01:01:58 <https://youtu.be/901lzGt2LTw>

- Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II 00:40:50 Washington National Cathedral, Jun 14, 2020 Sermon <https://youtu.be/eviTAayTGT4?t=135>
- "Why We Should All Read Malcolm X Today" Kehinde Andrews: "His analysis of racism is still prophetic." [www.j.mp/kehindex](http://www.j.mp/kehindex)
- "The Racial Contract," Adam Serwer, *The Atlantic*, May 8, 2020 "Nonwhite subpersonhood is enshrined simultaneously with white personhood." [www.j.mp/subperson](http://www.j.mp/subperson)
- Police: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver Epithet- and profanity-laced tirade against abuse of police power <https://youtu.be/Wf4cea5oObY>
- The Power of Black Lives Matter *Rolling Stone* [www.j.mp/RS-BLM](http://www.j.mp/RS-BLM)
- Rosedale, Queens, 1975 <https://nyti.ms/2YiOvJk>

### You've Got to be Carefully Taught

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

John Pizzarelli, Guitar/Vocals:

<https://youtu.be/sKIZiA7ZmtU>

### Black is Beautiful

"I cannot remember a time in my life when I wasn't earnestly happy about the fact of my blackness. Sin and shame are found in neither my body nor my identity. Blackness is an immense and defiant joy. The trauma is repetitive. We weep. But we are still, even in our most anguished seasons, not reducible to the fact of our grief. Rather, the capacity to access joy is a testament to the grace of living as a protest. To identify the achievement and exhilaration in Black life is not to mute or minimize racism, but to shame racism, to damn it to hell. In the footage of the protests over the past several weeks, we have seen Black people dancing, chanting, singing. Do not misunderstand. This is not an absence of grief or rage, or a distraction. It is insistence. If you join us, you might feel not only our pain but also the beauty of being human." (Imani Perry, *The Atlantic*, Jun 15, 2020)

When Steve worked at a church in East New York in the late 1960s, he was head-smart, wannabe heart-smart, and not-so-street-smart. The people of that community were more in touch with their heart and soul and body than he was. He is still grateful for who they were, and what they gave him: feeling not only their pain but also the beauty of being human.

### To be Young, Gifted, and Black

Nina Simone <https://youtu.be/ZelQEmnkulc>

<https://youtu.be/hdVFiANBtk?t=118>

### If you see something, say something.

But some in the crowd said to Jesus, "Hey man, tell your disciples to pipe down." He said, "I'm telling you that if they remain silent, the very stones will cry out."

(Luke 19: 39–40)

"Black people been sacrificed, made sacred, so that the

rest of the society can play dumb and numb and profane, enacting the sad fairy tale demanded of consumers under capitalism, while the soul flails and atrophies. As we turn to what heals the pain instead of obsessing over its causes, there might be some collateral casualties. The epidemic is the lies we tell to hide it until it's so severe it runs our lives, colonizes the collective imagination, strips us of our idea of agency and self-possession."

—Harmony Holiday, *Bomb*, Jun 3, 2020

Sacralizing Jesus and Martin Luther King, Jr. in particular, and Black people in general, is what Cornell West calls "Santa Clausification," where we idolize the messenger and ignore the message. We can no longer be silent when the message is ignored, distorted, or perverted. We cannot be silent when someone makes a racist, sexist, or homophobic joke or slur. We cannot remain mute when we see injustice, in word or deed, whether it's at the family table or in a house of worship or at the hands of those who are supposed to protect and serve. We have to call racist behavior racist. We have to call lies lies.

"We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken."

—Audré Lorde

"When the truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie." —Yevgeny Yevtushenko

### **"Continue to work with the faith...**

that unearned suffering is redemptive." —MLK, Jr. **Bullshit!** There has been enough suffering, we are already redeemed, and dues have been paid. "Suffering does not ennoble. It destroys." —Dorothy Allison

"My philosophy of life is that there is security in personal strength; that you can fight City Hall and win; that any action is better than no action, even if it's the wrong action; that you never reach glory or self-fulfillment unless you're willing to risk everything, dare anything, put yourself dead on the line every time; and that once one becomes strong or rich or potent or powerful it is the responsibility of the strong to help the weak become strong." —Harlan Ellison, *The Harlan Ellison Hornbook*

### **The Preacher and the Slave**

You will eat, bye and bye

In that glorious land above the sky

Work and pray, live on hay

You'll get pie in the sky when you die

—Joe Hill, 1911 <https://youtu.be/Pj236CwhlPw?t=129>

### **Walk It Like You Talk It**

### **Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852**

"What to the American slave is your Fourth of July. I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy's thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. For revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival."

Full text: [www.j.mp/july4fd](http://www.j.mp/july4fd)



### **The Rivers of Babylon**

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea! we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive, required of us a song; and they who wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Adapted from the texts of Psalms 19 and 137, and quoted by Frederick Douglass (above).

### **The Rivers of Babylon**

Boney M <https://youtu.be/ta42xU2UXLA>

### **The Kerner Report, Feb 29, 1968**

"Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain, and white society condones it. It is time now to turn with all the purpose at our command to the major unfinished business of this nation. It is time to adopt strategies for action that will produce quick and visible progress. It is time to make good the promises of American democracy to all citizens."

Full text: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6545>

### **Stormy Weather**

written by Harold Arlen, Ted Koehler

Eric Dolphy & Booker Little

<https://youtu.be/QP67vJz1vhg>

### **Time After Time**

written Cyndi Lauper & Robert Hyman

Cassandra Wilson <https://youtu.be/nyZf4xxvkIq>

Miles Davis [https://youtu.be/g3fzPUG9R\\_Y](https://youtu.be/g3fzPUG9R_Y)

**Strange Fruit** Abel Meeropol  
Bettye LaVette, from *Blackbirds*, out 8/2020  
<https://youtu.be/ErJGO2Kfjfo>



Meeropol cited this photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, August 7, 1930, as inspiring his poem.

## **There Is No White Jesus**

Famalam / BBC Three

<https://youtu.be/APMu32sC2nM>

## **Joy in the midst of suffering**

*“The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.”*

—Ralph Ellison, *Living with Music: Jazz Writings*

*“The one thing you can’t take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one’s freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstance.”*

—Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

*“White folks don’t understand the blues. They hear it come out, but they don’t know how it got there. They don’t understand that’s life’s way of talking. You don’t sing to feel better. You sing ‘cause that’s a way of understanding life.”* —Ma Rainey

*“All things draw from the same wellspring of spiritual energy. The sermonic and religious can be mediated through a saxophone just as effectively as through a pastor. For some, the call to worship comes as joy spurts from jazz riffs, wonder thunders from tappers’ feet, as we ponder Lamar’s prophetic insolence and Beyoncé’s Black girl magic. Each artistic moment is just slightly beyond our horizon of understanding. Perhaps we are confounded so that we might always have much to contemplate.”*

—Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*

## **Joy Comes Back**

Ruthie Foster, written by Sean Staples

*“I want to be ready when joy comes back to me.”*

<https://youtu.be/ZXp4BfMtQ-c>

## **Bobby McFerrin**

Boccherini, Minuet [https://youtu.be/3FM\\_UID2zTs](https://youtu.be/3FM_UID2zTs)

Improvisation <https://youtu.be/81uJZIF9TCs>

## **Hope**

*“And why does it make you sad to see how everything hangs by such thin and whimsical threads? Because you’re a dreamer, an incredible dreamer, with a tiny spark hidden somewhere inside you which cannot die, which even you cannot kill or quench and which tortures you horribly because all the odds are against its continual burning. In the midst of foulest decay and putrid savagery, this spark speaks to you of beauty, of human warmth and kindness, of goodness, of greatness, of heroism, of martyrdom, and it speaks to you of love.”*

—Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*

## **Hallelujah!** George Frideric Handel

with Quincy Jones <https://youtu.be/VoBwzLH2Aig>

## **Solitude**

Irving Mills, Duke Ellington, Eddie DeLange

Ben Webster, tenor sax <https://youtu.be/VihqeOi0Rn8>

## **Every Praise Is To Our God**

Hezekiah Walker, The Church Guide, Flash Mob

<https://youtu.be/bJGe6PcNvYU?t=46>

## **Now I’ll Sleep**

Charles Sullivan and DeeDee Bridgewater

<https://youtu.be/llna14oYO3M>

## **Second Line (Joe Avery’s Blues)**

Wynton Marsalis Quintet

[https://youtu.be/0RqWGuWIM\\_g](https://youtu.be/0RqWGuWIM_g)

## **Shake Sugaree** (Elizabeth Cotten)

Rhiannon Giddens <https://youtu.be/eLIEIbuh71o?t=45>

**Turn The World Around** *“We are of the spirit, truly of the spirit/Only can the spirit turn the world around”*

Harry Belafonte <https://youtu.be/GIPjUvOxAf0>

## **Lift Every Voice and Sing**

Beyonce <https://youtu.be/Rn4Xh99dd4>

Rene Marie <https://youtu.be/LIv2yNecYDM>

Alvin Ailey <https://youtu.be/TqfBlDHjnh0>

Ashley <https://youtu.be/kjRfbuY6-68>

Sean Jones <https://youtu.be/NvEr-38X1r4>

Cyrus Chestnut [https://youtu.be/T2YVVGHV\\_gM](https://youtu.be/T2YVVGHV_gM)

Charleston Jazz Orch <https://youtu.be/ONpA6PIs-Pc>