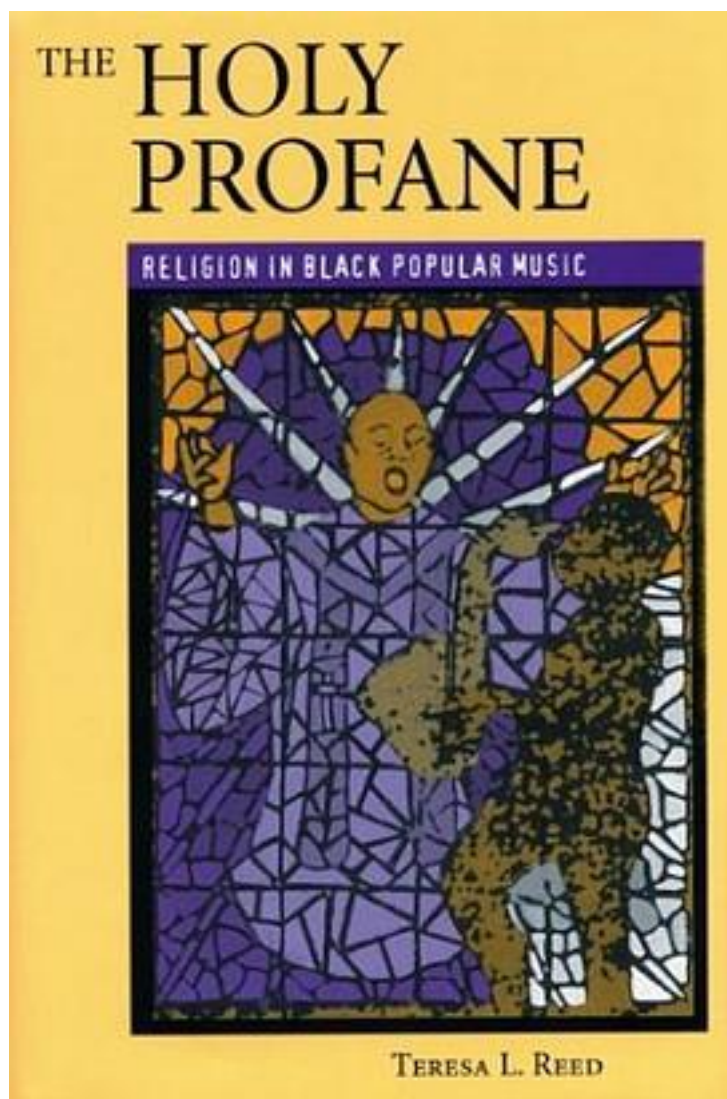


The Holy Profane



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" Winner of the 2004 ARSC Award for Best Research in Recorded Rock, Rhythm and Blues or Soul The Holy Profane explores the strong presence of religion in the secular music of twentieth-century African American artists as diverse as Rosetta Tharpe, Sam Cooke, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Earth, Wind and Fire, and Tupac Shakur. Analyzing lyrics and the historical contexts which shaped those lyrics, Teresa L. Reed examines the link between West-African musical and religious culture and the way African Americans convey religious sentiment in styles such as the blues, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, and gangsta rap. She looks at Pentecostalism and black secular music, minstrelsy and its portrayal of black religion, the black church, "crossing over" from gospel to RandB, images of the black preacher, and the salience of God in the rap of Tupac Shakur. Traditionally, west European culture has drawn distinct divisions between the secular and the sacred in music. Liturgical music belongs in church, not on pop radio, and artists who fuse the two are guilty of sacrilege. In the West-African worldview, however, both music and the divine permeate every imaginable part of life -- so much so that concepts like sacred and secular were entirely foreign to African slaves arriving in the colonies. The Western influence on African Americans eventually resulted in more polarization between these two musical forms, and black musicians who grew up singing in church were often lamented as hellbound once they found popular success. Even these artists, however, never completely left behind their West-African musical ancestry. Reed's exploration of this trend in African American music connects the work of today's artists to their West-African ancestry -- a tradition that over two-hundred years of Western influence could not completely stamp out.

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