The major purpose of this work is to show how early Black caregivers and pioneering social workers used spirituality in their work with Black people, in their struggle to achieve racial justice and gender equality, and in their efforts to create a truly democratic society. This study primarily takes a historical perspective to demonstrate that earlier generations of Black lay and professional helpers used spirituality as the basis for distinguishing Black people from their oppressors; for critiquing society; for affirming dignity, integrity, and self worth; for promoting interracial cooperation and cultural diversity; and for achieving Black sanity, communal solidarity, and social support. The chief focus of this study is on the implications of spirituality in the Black helping tradition for social workers in the 21st century. The key question is: What is the extent to which spirituality can serve these functions for social work practitioners today?

In the Black helping tradition, spirituality is defined as the sense of the sacred and divine. Spirituality gave Black people the strength to go on when there were threats to their very existence, self-worth, and dignity when oppressive forces were seeking to strip them of their humanity, hope when there seemed to be none, a way when there was no way, and even joy when confronted by nothing but a daily rhythm of hardship, frustration, and pain. In the face of the most demoralizing circumstances, spirituality gave Black people both courage and encouragement, and even in the midst of suffering and death, it gave them a will to live and the determination to make life worth living. Historically, Black spirituality was expressed in countless ways, such as through singing, dancing, moaning, mourning, affirming, worshipping, contemplating, reflecting, shouting, praying, preaching, and testifying. However, most importantly, it was expressed in the way people lived their lives and in the reverence and respect they had for life. Black people historically spoke of spirituality in terms of "lifting the spirit"; of finding that divine spark that would motivate them "to keep on keeping on"; of being "in the spirit"; of living their lives the way they believed God intended

human beings to live; and of "feeling the spirit" so deep in their souls that it often made them want to shout. Whatever terms Black people used to captivate the essence of their sense of the sacred, spirituality was their incentive to decency, to respecting life, to treating people properly, and to carrying on their rich Black tradition of helping.

In the urban Black community where we do cultural and social work, demonstrations of black atomization, alienation, and divisiveness are commonplace. A group of Black people attending a funeral are robbed by street denizens. Black preachers have iron bars on the doors and windows of their churches. Elderly people are in constant fear for their safety. Young people find myriad ways to brutalize and disrespect one another. School teachers are often afraid of the children they teach, and mothers are often afraid of their own children. While numerous positive forces also operate in this community, many elders believe that the community has lost something that is vital to the sanity and wholeness of its people. They remember the days when funerals, churches, preachers, old folks, children, babies, teachers, and mothers were sacred. They recall a time when it was considered a divine act to hold these sacred people, spaces, and places in reverence and respect. They believe that something more than social welfare programs calling for Black adjustment to the status quo and more than brick and mortar and money are needed to revitalize and develop impoverished Black communities. They mourn the loss of a time when a strong sense of the holy, sacred, and divine was deep within the souls and social heritage of Black people.

Canda (1997) was correct in his assessment that "during the period of slavery, people of African descent mobilized mutual support and liberation systems inspired by traditional African spirituality and Christian principles under extremely adverse conditions" (p. 300). He was also correct in stating that, "Unfortunately, there is little published information about the impact of these various developments on the formation of professional social work" (p. 300). This work seeks to bridge this knowledge gap. It takes up the concerns of Black elders and explores Black spirituality as a neglected topic in the social work profession.

In our previous work on the Black helping tradition (J. M. Martin & Martin, 1985), we spoke of Black spirituality largely in terms of "religious consciousness." We emphasized that religious consciousness, along with racial consciousness and fictive kinship, were key components to passing the Black helping tradition from one generation to the next. We indicated that

enslaved Africans in America believed that religious consciousness was the key to their survival and their endurance. We wrote:

> The worship of God ... gave them a sense of personal significance and worth in a world in which they were defined not as human beings but as property. The belief that God recognized them as equals to [W]hites, that God recognized each of them personally as one of his children, and more important, that God was on their side served as powerful medicine over sick souls and frustrated hopes. (J. M. Martin & Martin 1985, p. 28)

This religious consciousness continued among free Black people during slavery as they built churches to serve as a spiritual refuge. The previous work ended with a discussion of the decline of religious consciousness among Black people. It suggested that although countless generations of Black people believed they had come this far by faith, even the Black church was having problems stemming from the decline of religious consciousness in modern urban Black life.

This new study gives a fuller, more in-depth account of religious consciousness. This work shows that practically all of the early caregivers, from the native healers in traditional Africa to the "race men" and "race women" of the 19th century operated largely from a spiritual frame of reference. It even shows that before social work moved in a purely secularistic, naturalistic, and empirical direction, pioneering Black social workers at the turn of the 20th century had no problem professing their own spirituality, identifying the spirituality of their clients, and working spiritual paradigms into the intervention process. Early Black caregivers and pioneering Black social workers knew that spirituality was so dominant in the lives of Black people that they could not treat it lightly or shrug off this most crucial aspect of Black life as unimportant and insignificant. Moreover, they knew that to keep from becoming alienated from their people, they had to treat spirituality as a serious, normal, acceptable, healthy, and wholesome part of the Black caregiving experience.

Early Black caregivers and pioneering Black social workers were acutely aware that Black people were essentially a spiritual people who defined their reality and structured their lives largely in spiritual terms. They knew that many traditional Africans and enslaved Africans in America saw the spiritual world as the ultimate reality and everything not related to it as an illusion.

Also, they knew that Black people often did not make any clear distinction between religiosity and spirituality. Both spirituality and religiosity in the minds of Black people were concerned with matters of the sacred, eternal, and divine; both dealt with issues of justice and injustice, good and evil, suffering and redemption, death and eternal life, and right and wrong human conduct; and both involved a relationship between a fragile, vulnerable people and an invisible, omnipotent higher power. If Black people made any distinction between religiosity and spirituality, they often associated religion with a religious institution or denomination (such as the Black church) and associated spirituality with one's personal and communal ties to an invisible supernatural realm (whether one belonged to a religious institution or not). In the Black helping tradition, spirituality tends to supersede religiosity. Spirituality is viewed in terms of deep concern for and commitment to the collective well-being; religiosity, at its best, is seen as a manifestation of a spirituality based on human compassion and caring.

This study shows that, historically, religious consciousness by itself did not necessarily lead to enhanced caregiving in the Black family and community. It shows that because many enslaved Africans swallowed wholesale or in part the racist religious mythology and imagery of their slave master, their ability to mourn the plight of Black people and to feel their people were worthy and deserving of the maximum level of care was severely hampered. These enslaved Africans had to break the religious grip that the slave master's propaganda had on their minds and develop a counter spiritual and racial consciousness that would affirm their self-worth and status as human beings. Moreover, many Black people saw their religious conversion primarily in terms of personal salvation, not social salvation. Hence, their religious quest was a private, personal quest that often led less to the higher development of caregiving impulses than to a feeling of self-righteousness, individualism, and moral superiority over Black "unsaved sinners." In the Black helping tradition, a strong sense of caring, communalism, and mutuality went hand-in-hand, reinforcing one another with spirituality as the central, integrating component. This explains why pioneering Black social workers often felt that even the Black church should come under a higher form of Black spirituality that concerned itself with the daily social problems confronting Black people today.

Operating out of this religious and spiritual worldview where distinctions between what is sacred and what is profane were blurred, early Black care-

givers had no problem incorporating prayers, Bible readings, sacred songs, tributes to the ancestors, spirit possessions, and even attendance at sacred ceremonies and religious services as part of the remedy to the problems facing their clients. They felt that the spiritual support Black people gave to one another in their mourning work was often the difference between uplift and degradation, sanity and insanity, survival and death. If spirituality in the intervention process did not move political and economic mountains for their clients, early Black caregivers and professional helpers generally felt confident that it would at least quell anxieties and fears, relieve stress, and maybe even instill hope so that their clients could face another day.

So deeply embedded was the spiritual worldview in the psyche of Black people that few pioneering Black helping professionals at the beginning of the 20th century professed a belief in the superiority of the scientific, secularistic worldview over the sacred worldview, neither in terms of explaining, understanding, and predicting nor in terms of controlling and changing social phenomena. Later, of course, this was to change as Black social workers, following the lead of Freudian and other secularistic thinking in professional social work, came to profess a strong belief in the scientific method and even came to see spirituality as an illusion, a narcotic, and a psychic disturbance.

In earlier periods of Black history, a helping, caring person committed to the uplift and well-being of Black people was generally considered to be a spiritual person. In its intimate connection to Black caregiving, spirituality in the Black helping tradition

- promoted a sense of community and social support
- enhanced communal and racial self-development
- established social myths to counter racist mythomania
- laid the foundation for creating a Black strength perspective
- helped Black people to develop the ability to mourn
- served as a major source of inspiration and hope.

Above all else, spirituality in the Black helping tradition was geared toward the promotion of community through Black communal solidarity and social support. Black spirituality sought to integrate the broken, isolated, alienated, atomized, and disconnected strands of Black humanity with the group. It was oriented toward harmonizing human relations, linking
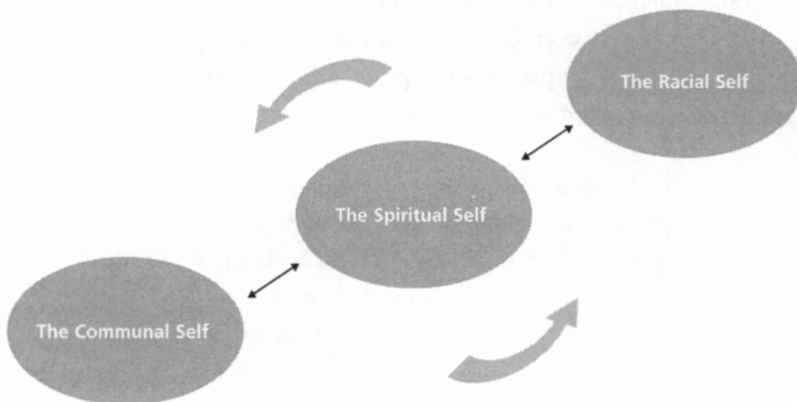
Black people to social support networks, promoting racial cooperation, and bringing those Black people who were seen as social deviants and outcasts back into a Black caring community.

The Black helping tradition also believed that spiritual self-development was a necessary component for developing the caring personality. In fact, caring itself was seen as a spiritual act. A selfish, antisocial, hostile, greedy, socially aggressive, and antagonistic person was considered to be spiritually alienated, if not spiritually dead. Such a person was viewed as a threat to group survival and solidarity and a disturber of cosmic harmony. During the enslavement of African people, the spiritual self also provided the foundation for developing the racial self. No question more profoundly touched the depth of what it means to be Black in a White-dominated society than the question of the Black people's relation to God, nature, and the universe. The question of their relation to the divine was the central question around which other life-and-death questions evolved. What is the meaning of Black suffering? What is the nature of evil? Is God really just? Is God on the side of the oppressed? Is there a better life beyond the present hell some Black people are experiencing? Can Black life be made livable and meaningful under a daily system of relentless oppression?

In the Black helping tradition, a person was considered healthy and whole if the communal self and the racial self revolved around a strong spiritual core. As Figure 1 shows, the racial and the communal selves informed by a central spiritual self were seen as the major components for forming the caregiving personality.

The Caregiving Personality
Figure 1: The Racial Self and the Communal Self
Revolving around the Spiritual Self

The caregiving personality in the Black helping tradition, then, is a spiritualized, socialized, and racialized personality seeking psychic stability and wholeness and promoting a sense of "we-ness" among the people. Spirituality, racial identity and worth, and communal action go together as the pillars of the Black helping tradition. The spiritual attached Black people to their place and role in the world and determined the extent to which they felt a sense of commitment to the well-being and uplift of Black people.

In our effort to highlight the Black helping tradition, in this book we make considerable use of Black autobiographies, with particular focus on the life stories of early Black caregivers and pioneering Black social workers. What we have found is that the "self" in Black autobiographies is a social, communal, largely prosocial self operating in a specific historical context. As C. L. Martin (1993) stated:

> The self of African-American autobiography is no mere 'lonely sojourner' on the road to life, no isolate with private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan ... a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. ... The self belongs to the people, and the people find voice in the self. (p. 18)

For example, in her studies of slave narratives, Starling (1981) stated that the narrators "were not telling of themselves alone" but of how their personal destinies were intertwined with the destinies of other slaves (p. 305).

By focusing on African American autobiographies, we seek to avoid presenting a helping experience based on historical abstractions. We seek to capture the essence of Black spirituality in the Black helping tradition by focusing on real, flesh-and-blood people operating in real historical situations. We seek an in-depth exploration of how spirituality works its way through the lives of Black individuals and transforms them from victims and dependents to agents and doers fashioning a better world for themselves and their people. By using autobiographical and biographical material we not only show the individual career as a microcosm of wider communal and caregiving commitments, but we also rescue from relative obscurity the biographies of some early Black caregivers and social workers who have made outstanding contributions to the Black helping tradition and to the social work profession.

A very important function of spirituality in the Black helping tradition was to create social myths to counter racist propaganda. In contemporary society, the word "myth" is generally synonymous with lies, half-truths, and distortions. However, we use it in respect to its older usage, as an expression of eternal truth through tales rich with metaphor and symbolism. In traditional Africa, people relied heavily on a collection of myths dealing with history, cosmology, supernatural beings, totems, animals, ancestors, and heroes to express eternal truths and to highlight sacred tradition. Although African myths are usually "phantasmagoric tales of gods and demons, exaggerated humans, improbable animals, impossible places, and unbelievable series of serendipitous events" (Ford, 1999), they served to inform and shape the worldview of African people, gave sanction to their customs and beliefs, and helped them to establish moral order and authority. Myths were used to impart proverbs, stories, metaphors, examples, and teachings, which served to promote group cohesiveness and ancestral connectedness and to give African people a unique sense of their identity and place in the world. Enslaved Africans and oppressed but free Black people in North America also felt a need to develop social myths that were powerful enough to combat the all-powerful racist mythomania deeming Black people inferior. They felt the need to free their spirit—their souls—from the baggage of egotism, cultural amnesia, and internalized racist propaganda. By drawing from stories from the Holy Bible, and from their own pantheon of historical heroes, folktales, and legends, Black people were able to create their own body of social myths that allowed them to view service to a higher power and helping others as actualizing and transcending values. By creating their own social myths, based on their spiritual strivings and beliefs, they were able to lay claim to their own larger-than-life historical and mythical heroes. These people were also able to develop the idea that they were not only part of a vast, divine force that was bigger than their troubles in this world but also a firm belief that no human power, no matter how ruthless and cunning, could deprive them of the dignity, integrity, and self-worth they received from the divine.

By creating positive social myths to counter racist mythomania, early Black caregivers also developed a strength perspective. Their spirituality allowed them to believe that Black people had special gifts and talents that were given to them by God and their ancestors, not by their oppressors. They believed that if Black people cultivated their God-given and

ancestral genius, they would shape the destiny of Black people and make a major contribution to the world. Black caregivers strongly believed that one of their most important roles was to help Black people realize and cultivate their God-given gifts and become more fully and wholly African people.

Black elders today believe that, in essence, Black people should mourn the loss of their sense of the sacred. They should mourn the loss of their African homeland, African gods, and the millions of ancestors who died in the middle passage (the Maafa). They should mourn the thousands of Black people who fill the modern-day slave ships called prisons and the daily, senseless deaths of Black young people on the pavement of big-city streets. They should mourn the loss of their spiritual life, which keeps them centered and connected and which provides them with a rich, creative process of collective empathy, therapy, and social support. Many Black elders today believe that as Black people lose their sense of the sacred, they lose their ability to mourn. They lose hope. They lose the fire in their souls, and they need Black leaders who lift their spirits. These elders sense a time when the chief role of Black caregivers from the traditional African leaders to the early pioneering Black social workers was to instill hope and inspire Black people to more liberating visions of themselves and their possibilities. The renowned African novelist, Armah (1978), believed that inspiration was the major source of power to traditional African healers:

> We healers do not fear power. We avoid power deliberately, as long as that power is manipulative power. There is a kind of power we would all embrace and help create. It is the same power we use in our work: the power of inspiration. The power that respects the spirit in every being, in every thing, and lets every being be true to the spirit within. Healers should embrace that kind of power. (p. 309)

Inspiration was important to Black ministers, the chief helping professionals in early African American history. It was the primary tool of their work. Early Black social workers also believed that inspiration was crucial in circumventing the rise of alienation, defeatism, bitterness, and despair among Black people. To what extent have Black social workers today lost the power of inspiration for more manipulative methods of intervention?

As we explore spirituality in the Black helping tradition from a historical perspective, we are acutely aware that although spirituality in the past was the driving force behind Black caregiving, social work gradually shook off the remnants of its spiritual and religious roots to become fundamentally a secularistic profession, operating almost solely from a naturalistic perspective. We are well aware that currently there is a schism between Black spirituality and social work similar to the conflict Mendes (1982) recognized earlier between Black religion and psychotherapy. Mendes held that psychotherapy had come to explain physical and social phenomena in the empirical world solely in terms of natural causation and remedies and to view "humanity, not God or some other supraempirical reality" as "the center of life" (p. 206). Black people, of course, operated from a religious and spiritual perspective that saw "God-determination, rather than self-determination" as "the highest value" (p. 206).

Social work also abandoned the God-determination helping paradigm for a more secularistic approach. This way of viewing reality gained momentum among Black social workers during the Great Depression years of the 1930s. By the end of World War II, Black social workers had practically given up any reference to spiritual needs as an area of consideration for social work practice. Black social workers followed other social workers in the psychodynamic direction and began to view social problems not in terms of religious and spiritual values but in terms of value-neutrality, objectivity, and empirical observation. Black people also began to behave as if the secular techniques of social work were universally applicable to all people, regardless of color, culture, or historical circumstance.

The 1990s saw a resurgence of spirituality in social work, sparked in part by the growing interest people tend to have in religious matters and apocalyptic thinking on the eve of a new millennium. Smith (1997) stated that the relatively recent interest in spirituality is due in part to so many people of all races feeling that they are spiritually uprooted refugees with few attachments to community and little emotional support from deeply held religious beliefs (p. 39).

Because spiritual "rootlessness" is part of a deeper malaise operating in mainstream American culture, spirituality is destined to become an integral part of the social work curriculum. The key question of this study is: To what extent are social workers today equipped to revive spirituality in the Black helping tradition and to use spirituality as a vital instrument for strengthening and empowering Black individuals, families, and communities?

As we pursue the historical significance and contemporary relevance of spirituality in the Black helping tradition, the key concepts of this book are defined as follows:

- *The Black helping tradition* is defined as the largely independent struggle of Black people to collectively promote their survival and advancement from one generation to the next.
- Black spirituality is the sense of the sacred and divine that inspires, motivates, and uplifts Black people and endows them with dignity, self-worth, meaning, purpose, and hope as they seek to transcend and transform soul-destroying, life-threatening systems.
- Black religiosity is a manifestation of Black spirituality that is often viewed in terms of organized religion and denominational ties. In the Black experience, the lines between religiosity and spirituality are often blurred. Spirituality in the Black helping tradition supersedes and overarches religiosity.
- The caregiving personality comprises the spiritual, racial, and communal selves as components of the total caregiving or helping self.
- "Race work" was an effort by 19th-century Black people to advance the survival, liberation, and well-being of Black people. It was Black people's form of social work in the 19th century.

With these concepts as the chief organizing principles of the book, the chapters are organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides an introduction.
- Chapter 2 examines the role of spirituality in traditional African helping practices by following a case example.
- Chapter 3 discusses how conjurers and slave preachers used religion and spirituality on the slave plantation to give enslaved Africans a feeling of some control over their lives and to inspire them to seek freedom.
- Chapter 4 explores spirituality among enslaved Africans in America and the torturous process of freeing themselves from the slaveholder's religious mythomania, propaganda, and imagery and developing a sense of racial self-worth conducive to serving their own communal interest as a people.
- Chapter 5 analyzes race work and spirituality among 19th-century freed Black people during and after slavery.

- Chapter 6 discusses the attempt of early Black scholars such as
W. E. B. Du Bois and Alexander Crummell to shape race work into
a sophisticated, systematic social philosophy to serve as a strength
perspective to bridge race work to the new profession of social work
and to guide the advancement and liberation cause.
- Chapter 7 draws from the biographies of four Black pioneering male
social workers—Reverdy C. Ransom, R. R. Wright, Jr., Edmund Haynes,
and Monroe N. Work—to explore how they used the race work spiritual
paradigm in their social work practice with Black people.
- Chapter 8 discusses the leadership role of four pioneering Black female
social workers—S. Willie Layten, Eva Bowles, Mamie De Mena, and
Thyra Edwards—in their attempts to form fictive kinship (communal) ties
with Black women in a quest for gender empowerment and community.
- Chapter 9 evaluates the limitations and strengths of mainstream social
work in dealing with issues of Black spirituality, and provides a framework
for incorporating Black spirituality into contemporary social work practice.
- Chapter 10 reviews the efforts of the American-centered and the
Black experience-based social work paradigms to revive spirituality in the
Black helping tradition. The chapter also shows how these paradigms use
spirituality in the intervention process on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Overall, spirituality in the Black helping tradition might appear in some
sense to be a relic of the past with little usefulness in a rapidly changing sec-
ular, postmodern age of information. However, there are already numerous
empirical studies (Hill, 1997; Jagers & Mock, 1993; Mattis, 1997; Potts, 1991)
suggesting that religious or spiritual orientation may be crucial to the
prevention of antisocial behavior and other negative life outcomes of Black
people, particularly young Black people. To untold numbers of Black
people over the generations, spirituality in the Black helping tradition has
been a powerful tool for survival, sanity, group solidarity, and liberation.
Historically, Black people believed that spirituality and caring were the twin
pillars of racial and communal consciousness. The new century affords yet
another opportunity for Black people to get back in tune with the sacred
heritage that they believed for hundreds of years represented the best
within themselves.