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ABSTRACT

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KEMETIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN THEMES IN
THE LYRICS AND VISUAL ART OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE, 1973-1983

Committee Chair: Thomas Scott, Th.D.

Dissertation dated December 2017

By the mid-1970s, Earth, Wind & Fire (EWF) became one of the most
commercially successful pop music bands in the world. Their dynamic sound thrilled
listeners and their elaborate concerts captivated audiences. EWF stood out from other
artists with their philosophical messages and their use of ancient Egyptian symbols and
imagery in their visual art. The ancient Egyptian themes intrigued fans but drew
criticism from others. This study examines the ancient Egyptian themes incorporated
into the lyrics of the songs recorded by the band. This study also examines the ancient
Egyptian symbols used in the EWF’s visual art, including album covers, music videos,
and concerts.

A content analysis was conducted to study the lyrics and identify themes related
to ancient Egyptian spirituality. A content analysis was also used to study the visual art
and decipher what the symbols may signify. This research was based on the premise that
Earth, Wind & Fire used their artistry to be a positive influence. When the lyrics and
visual art were examined, the researcher found that they both contain themes of ancient
wisdom and universal truths. The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest that
EWF’s mission was to raise the consciousness of the world, and the way people
responded is an indication that the mission was accomplished. The findings also suggest
that the negative criticism EWF has received is unjustifiable.
KEMETIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN THEMES IN
THE LYRICS AND VISUAL ART OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE, 1973-1983

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
TRENTON BAILEY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................... iii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 1
   Black Arts Movement ............................................................................................................... 3
   Creation of Earth, Wind & Fire ............................................................................................ 13
   Classic Period ...................................................................................................................... 20
   Everything Must Change .................................................................................................... 31
   Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 33
   Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 35
   Rationale .......................................................................................................................... 36
   Outline of Chapters ........................................................................................................... 37

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................................... 39
   Black Arts Movement ....................................................................................................... 40
   Earth, Wind & Fire ........................................................................................................... 46
   Funk Music ....................................................................................................................... 49
   African-American Music ................................................................................................. 55
   Popular Music ................................................................................................................... 64
   Ancient Egyptian Aesthetics ............................................................................................ 66
   Rhetoric ............................................................................................................................ 76

III. METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 81
   Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................... 81
   Rhetoric ............................................................................................................................ 86
CHAPTER

Research Methods ........................................................................................................... 99
Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 99

IV. VISUAL STATE OF MIND: EXAMINING THE KEMETIC THEMES IN THE VISUAL ART OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE ................................................ 101

Spirit ................................................................................................................................. 109
All ‘N All ........................................................................................................................ 111
Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. 1 .................................................................................... 122
I Am ................................................................................................................................. 124
Faces ............................................................................................................................... 128
Let Me Talk ....................................................................................................................... 130
Raise ............................................................................................................................... 135
Fall in Love with Me ......................................................................................................... 137
Electric Universe ........................................................................................................... 143

V. WHAT THE MUSIC SAID: ANALYZING THE KEMETIC THEMES IN THE LYRICS OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE ............................................. 145

Head to the Sky ................................................................................................................ 150
Open Our Eyes ............................................................................................................... 153
That’s the Way of the World ........................................................................................... 156
Gratitude .......................................................................................................................... 163
Spirit ............................................................................................................................... 166
All ‘N All ........................................................................................................................ 172
I Am ................................................................................................................................. 184
Raise ............................................................................................................................... 187
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Earth, Wind, & Fire (EWF) is one of the greatest bands in the history of African-American music. Since the band’s founding in 1969, they have sold more than ninety million records. This achievement makes EWF one of the best-selling bands of all time. They have also won numerous prestigious awards, including six Grammy Awards, four American Music Awards, and three Lifetime Achievement honors.\(^1\) EWF is one of the first African-American popular music bands to have mass crossover appeal. In 1975, EWF became the first African-American music act to reach number one on Billboard’s album and singles charts simultaneously. This was accomplished when their signature hit song “Shining Star” and the album *That’s the Way of the World* both climbed to the top of the charts.\(^2\)

Earth, Wind & Fire came of age in the early 1970s, during the zenith of the American Black Arts Movement. This was a time when many African Americans were no longer marching and protesting to gain equality as they had during the African-American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Instead, several African-American


artists used music to combat the harsh reality of American society. Earth, Wind & Fire became known for their unique sound and inspirational lyrics. Earth, Wind, and Fire experienced their classic period from 1973 to 1983, at the height of their popularity. Most of the songs the band released as singles during this period became hit records. These hit songs include “Reasons,” “September,” “Boogie Wonderland,” and “Let’s Groove.”

Earth, Wind & Fire has demonstrated remarkable versatility by delivering soulful ballads, spiritual anthems, Afro-Caribbean jazz, funk, and disco hits. The band’s songs offered uplifting poetic lyrics with romantic and playful themes of universal brotherhood, spiritual enlightenment, and sentimental romance. During its classic period, the band was known for spectacular concerts that featured gigantic stage props, fancy costumes, and grand illusions. The band leader, Maurice White, drew inspiration from his affection for ancient Egyptian thought and imagery to further embellish the band’s unique image. Earth, Wind & Fire is also known for having elaborate album covers which display Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) symbols. The lyrics of many of the band’s song showcase Kemetic themes. Kemet is the original name of ancient Egypt. The terms ‘Kemetic’ and ‘ancient Egyptian’ may be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

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Black Arts Movement

Earth, Wind & Fire was created by Maurice White in Chicago, Illinois, in 1969 at the height of the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement began in 1965 and ended around 1975. This was a period when many African Americans had found a great sense of African pride. African Americans established their own beauty standards and adopted the slogan “black is beautiful.” Many African Americans were wearing African-inspired clothing, such as dashikis and kufi caps, and they were wearing African hairstyles, such as cornrows and Afros. African aesthetics, specifically ancient Egyptian, are displayed in EWF’s visual art.

The author has been a fan of Earth, Wind & Fire since he was in nursery school. He has older siblings who listened to popular music while he was around them. The author was mesmerized by the band’s sound and he was intrigued by the symbols on the album covers. He was also fascinated by the African-styled costumes the musicians wore on stage or in photographs. The author had learned about the greatness of ancient Egypt while in elementary school, but the only time he saw ancient Egyptian symbols associated with black people is when he saw them in the visual art of EWF. This encouraged the author to seek images of “black” Egyptians.

In 1968, Larry Neal, scholar of African-American theatre, described the Black Arts Movement as an eclectic group of black writers, artists, and performers dedicated to defining and celebrating a uniquely ‘black aesthetic’. He also posited that the Black Arts
Movement is the ‘spiritual sister’ of the Black Power Movement.⁴ According to Neal, a main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for African Americans to define the world in their own terms. African-American artists made the same point in the context of aesthetics. The two movements postulated that there were in fact and in spirit two Americas – one black and one white. The African-American artist took this to mean that his/her primary duty was to speak to the cultural and spiritual needs of African Americans. Therefore, the main thrust of artists who came of age during the Black Arts Movement was to confront the contradictions arising out of the African’s experience in the West. These artists were re-evaluating western aesthetics, the traditional role of the artist, and the social function of art.⁵

According to Floyd Barbour who served as Director of Afro-American Studies at Simmons College, like the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement sought to liberate African Americans from what Neal calls “the Euro-Western sensibility” that has enslaved, oppressed, and ‘niggerized’ African Americans since the merciless slave ships began shanghaing Africans from their homeland to the United States of America. There could be no dichotomy between the two. Both had to be interrelated and supportive of each other if true liberation was ever to be realized. So long as white America was

⁴ Brian Ward, Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 408.

successful in suppressing the culture of African Americans, it was able to impose its own moral decline and thereby deny African Americans of their cultural heritage.\(^6\)

Some of the most crucial goals of the Black Arts Movement are listed as follows:

1. Create cultural programs that were designed to raise the level of black awareness among African-American children.

2. Build repertory theaters which could produce plays at a nominal fee which could be made accessible to the African-American community.

3. Establish multi-functional cultural institutions, whereby there could be cross-communication between artists, writers, photographers, dancers, and musicians.

4. Encourage community groups to sponsor cultural activities, such as writers’ workshops, art fairs, festivals, community theaters, etc.\(^7\)

These four goals were realized in the Chicago Black Arts Movement. Chicago, as well as New York City, became the meccas of the national Black Arts Movement. The black arts of Chicago influenced several artists and Chicago is the city in which Earth, Wind & Fire was formed. In order to reveal the texture of the Chicago Black Arts Movement, it is necessary to unveil the full significance of the *Wall of Respect* and especially, the Affro-Arts Theater.

The *Wall of Respect* was a 30’ x 60’ mural on the corner of 43rd and Langley on Chicago’s ‘South Side’ that was completed in 1967 and destroyed in 1971 when the City of Chicago razed the neighborhood and declared the site unsafe after a suspicious fire

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\(^7\) Ibid., 93-94.
occurred.\textsuperscript{8} The site had become a locus of dance, poetry, drama, and public speaking. The \textit{Wall of Respect} was more than just the mural. Margo Natalie Crawford, Associate Professor of English at Cornell University, claims it was a cultural production which included people from the neighborhood, the artists who painted the mural, the poets who read their work there, the photographers whose art reproduced and preserved the \textit{Wall}, and the many Black Arts participants who lived in other parts of Chicago’s ‘South Side’ but gravitated toward this cultural center.\textsuperscript{9} The \textit{Wall} became so popular that the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) got involved.

The OBAC visual arts workshop decided to shape the \textit{Wall} around eight categories: rhythm and blues, jazz, theater, statesmen, religion, literature, sports, and dance. In each of these categories, the workshop members created a list of Black cultural heroes who would be represented on the \textit{Wall}. The rhythm and blues category included Billie Holiday, Muddy Waters, and James Brown, a pioneer of funk music. The statesmen category included Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Marcus Garvey. The heroes chosen for the jazz category were Charles Parker, Ornette Coleman, and Nina Simone. Gwendolyn Brooks was chosen as a literary heroine. The heroes chosen were those who were perceived to not compromise their humanity. The heroes were African


Americans who were charting their own course, using art to forward the movement of the people, and putting art to the service of the movement.\textsuperscript{10} A short distance from the \textit{Wall of Respect} was the Affro-Arts Theater.

The Affro-Arts Theater was founded in 1967 by Phil Cohran in the old Oakland Square Theater at 3947 South Drexel. At that time, the theater became a focal point for growing Black consciousness among African Americans in Chicago. In addition, the Affro-Arts Theater symbolized the national aspirations of African Americans who sought to revitalize and elevate their social and cultural status. Clovis E. Semmes, Professor Emeritus of African-American Studies at Eastern Michigan University, described Phil Cohran as a respected musician who emerged as a mystic and visionary who saw divine purpose in music as a medium for inspiration, intellectual and spiritual elevation, and social development.

Phil Cohran was born May 8, 1927, in Oxford, Mississippi. Before reaching his teens, Cohran and his family moved to St. Louis and then near Troy, Missouri, to escape the oppressive conditions in Mississippi. He attended Lincoln University High School where he received training in piano, trumpet, and other brass, stringed, and percussive instruments. After high school, Cohran attended Lincoln University in Missouri for one year and dropped out for financial reasons. In 1950, he joined Jay McShann’s band.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 25-27.
This introduced Cohran to new and stimulating experiences that increased his understanding of the sensibilities of African-American audiences.¹¹

Just as Phil Cohran was becoming successful as a musician, he was drafted into the army during the Korean War but he avoided combat when he was selected for intensive musical training at the Naval School of Music at Anacostia. After leaving the army, Cohran worked with a number of accomplished musicians but found his greatest growth by working in Chicago with jazz wizard Sun Ra.

For Sun Ra, according to Teresa Reed, author of *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music*, jazz was little more than a means for preaching the unique gospel of Egyptology, astrology, ancient mysticism, Islam and revised Christianity. He believed black people needed to be conscious of the fact that they lived in a changing world and that funk musicians were like space warriors. Sun Ra felt that music could be used as a weapon, as energy. The right note or chord can transport a musician into space using music and energy flow. And the listener could travel along with the musician.¹²

Sun Ra was born Herman Blount in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 22, 1914, to a woman fascinated with Afrocentric magic. He was named after Black Herman, the most famous of early twentieth-century Afrocentric magicians. As he developed musically, he became immersed in Egyptology. Blount legally changed his name to Sun Ra in 1952.

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Sun Ra’s vision for his music transcended entertainment. He believed music could heal people physically and spiritually. Sun Ra’s spirituality included a deep interest in outer space, a theme common in Egyptology.\textsuperscript{13}

After leaving Sun Ra, Cohran rededicated himself to developing an understanding of how African music was linked to world history and civilizations. As Cohran studied world civilizations, he concluded that “since Africa was the root source…then he had to look at everything for its African elements.” Cohran believed that his music should reflect his African consciousness.\textsuperscript{14} It was this consciousness that inspired him to open the Affro-Arts Theater. He wanted African Americans to have a place where they could gather year-round.

Public dedication of the Affro-Arts Theater took place on Saturday, December 2, 1967 at 8:00 PM. The theater was widely supported by the African-American community and opened to an impressive crowd of 700 people. The theater attracted leading African-American spokespersons, such as Stokely Carmichael, LeRoi Jones, and the Reverend Albert Cleage, as well as noted artists. Artists included Oscar Brown, Jr., Gwendolyn Brooks, and the Ghana Dance Ensemble. The theater presented films and plays dealing with liberation and Black consciousness. The OBAC also gained a creative outlet through the theater. Maurice White, the creator of Earth, Wind & Fire, spent much time observing musical rehearsals and performances at the Affro-Arts Theater. Quite

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 138-140.

\textsuperscript{14} Semmes, 452.
significantly, Earth, Wind & Fire initially projected an African/Eastern rhythmic, tonal, and spiritual concept in their music similar to what had come from Phil Cohran and the Affro-Arts Theater. Unfortunately, the Affro-Arts Theater fell on hard times. Internal dissension, financial problems, and political harassment forced the theater to close in 1970.\textsuperscript{15} But the theater had served as a beacon of hope for the Black Arts Movement and became an inspiration for one of the greatest funk bands of all time: Earth, Wind & Fire.

During the Black Arts Movement, many African Americans rejected racial assimilation and looked instead to their own cultural roots for meaning and identity. Part of this process involved exchanging the traditional African-American Christian heritage for an African religious perspective. This is one of the premier characteristics of funk music. Rickey Vincent, author of \textit{Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One}, wrote that funk’s emphasis on oneness and sexual, physical, and mental liberation contrasts greatly with the good-versus-evil dichotomy of Western Christian thought and presents a challenge to traditional notions of salvation and redemption.\textsuperscript{16} Rickey Vincent gives a detailed explanation of funk music:

Funk music is deeply rooted in African cosmology – the idea that people are created in harmony with the rhythms of nature and that free expression is tantamount to spiritual and mental health. If we were to look into this African philosophy, the African roots of rhythm, spiritual oneness with the cosmos, and a comfort zone with sex and aspects of the body, we would find that funkiness is an ancient and worthy aspect of life. Thus, funk in its modern sense is a deliberate

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 457-458.

\textsuperscript{16} Reed, 137-138.
reaction to—and a rejection of—the traditional Western world’s predilection for formality, pretense, and self-repression.\textsuperscript{17}

Howard C. Harris also describes the essence of funk music: “Funk is a style of music in which elements of jazz, pop, rock, gospel, and the Blues are fused to create a rhythmic, soulful sound. Funk thrives on rhythm, and the art of it depends on the level of togetherness between the performers. It is, in essence, togetherness in motion.”\textsuperscript{18}

In funk jargon, “the rhythm of the one” is an important expression that relates to the spiritual trance state associated with West-African ritualistic dancing. Teresa Reed claims as in African ritual, the rhythms in funk encourage participants to dance, thereby creating and intensifying a collective pulse. Black identity and black pride are central to the oneness and liberation emphasized in funk.\textsuperscript{19}

At the dawn of the 1970s, a large number of black musical artists developed their styles toward the wide-open improvisations and soulful grooving associated with this funk music. Occasional acts defined their music as funk, such as the Bar-Kays, and James Brown named himself the “Minister of New Super Heavy Funk” in 1974, but overall, there were no critics to give this style of music a definitive term. So these artists were called “soul groups,” “dance bands,” “black rock,” “jazz funk,” and even “super groups.” Occasionally, they were called funk bands. The people called them whatever

\textsuperscript{17} Rickey Vincent, \textit{Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One} (New York: MacMillan, 1996), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{18} Howard C. Harris and William Fielder, \textit{Complete Book of Composition/Improvisation and Funk Techniques} (Houston: De Mos Music Publications, 1982), 114.

\textsuperscript{19} Reed, 138.
they wanted to call them. Nevertheless, artists like War, Kool & the Gang, and Earth, Wind & Fire were constantly referred to by critics as groups that utilized a ‘fusion’ of styles, as a ‘synthesis,’ and so on. It was so common with so many artists that a mix of styles eventually became known as funk music.²⁰

According to Kesha Morant, Associate Professor in Communication at Pennsylvania State University, funk music emerged out of a desire for a more confrontational approach to protest music. James Brown’s most empowering song, “Say It Loud,” was more than a cry of protest; it was a call to action. The immediacy and intensity of the song resonated with African Americans unlike any other popular music that had come before.²¹ Rickey Vincent declares that “Say It Loud” was a turning point in black music. Never before had black popular music explicitly reflected the bitterness of blacks toward white people – and here it is done with ferocious funk.²² The musical content encompassed self-empowerment, celebration, and self-love. It paved the way for improved self-esteem and community esteem, challenged social norms, and, most important, created a means for self-definition.

Kesha Morant declares that funk stands out among forms of black music during the Black Arts Movement because it paralleled the transition of American society from the era of Jim Crow (1890s to 1960s) to the 1970s, the decade of ‘integration’ and ‘equal

²⁰ Vincent, 15.


²² Vincent, 78.
opportunity.’ For many African Americans, the 1970s represented a paradox of social unrest and ubiquitous optimism. This optimism can be heard in many songs by Earth, Wind & Fire, such as “Getaway,” “Saturday Night,” and “Fantasy.”

**Creation of Earth, Wind & Fire**

Earth, Wind, & Fire is the brainchild of percussionist and singer, Maurice White. White was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on December 19, 1941. He grew up very poor in a south Memphis housing project. His mother, Edna, had moved to Chicago, Illinois, and married a podiatrist named Verdine Adams, Sr. Maurice White remained in Memphis with his grandmother. After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School, he moved to Chicago where he lived for 12 years. White studied percussion, jazz, and classical music formally at the Chicago Conservatory of Music. He worked at Chess Recording Company for five years, where he learned to master all types of music. White was a member of the Ramsey Lewis Trio from 1966 to 1969. After a three-year stint with Ramsey Lewis, he decided to form his own band with local musicians around Chicago. White wanted to create music that had a universal appeal. He believed that music should be a positive force in people’s lives and help them rise in personal stature.

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23 Morant, 74-75.


26 Bailey, 87.
White explained, “There was a vision I had of planetarium, Egyptology, all these things that would come together, and they grow with time.”

Maurice White hooked up with two friends, keyboardist Don Whitehead and singer/songwriter Wade Flemons, who had written and sung the hits “Here I Stand” and “Easy Lovin’” and, later, cowrote “Stay in My Corner” for the Dells. Together they became a songwriting team called Hummit Productions, composing songs and commercials and they eventually became a band they named the “Salty Peppers.” The Salty Peppers scored a regional hit with the single “La, La, La” on the Hummit label as well as on the TEC label in 1969. Capital Records picked up the song and rerecorded it as “La La Time” for national distribution.

When the second single, “Uh Huh Yeah,” didn’t do as well, White decided to leave the Ramsey Lewis Trio and focus solely on his new band. By 1970, he felt the band needed a more meaningful name. White’s zodiac sign is Sagittarius. Sagittarius has a primary elemental quality of fire and seasonal qualities of earth and air (wind). The four classical elements are earth, wind, fire, and water. White omitted water from the new name because it is not a part of his astrological chart, and he called it Earth, Wind, & Fire. This name change may have served as an indication of White’s affection for ancient Egypt; the zodiac has long been associated with ancient Egypt. In *Nile Valley*

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29 Bailey, 8.
Contributions to Civilization, Anthony Browder explains that the ancient Egyptians divided the heavens into 12 divisions in the southern sky, 12 divisions in the northern sky, and 12 divisions in the central sky. These 36 divisions were then divided among three seasons and from that delineation emerged the regions for the 12 signs of the zodiac.\(^{30}\)

In 1970, Maurice White decided to tweak the lineup of the band and relocate to Los Angeles. He recruited jazz singer Sherry Scott, a native Chicagoan who only stayed with the band for two years. Maurice White decided to enlist his younger half-brother, Verdine White, as bass guitar player.\(^{31}\) Verdine White started his formal training in his preteens studying the upright bass violin. After performing several years with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, he began his professional career playing the electric bass guitar in Chicago jazz clubs and in neighboring cities. Through this training, he became one of the most electrifying bass guitar players in the world.\(^{32}\) Verdine White became an important member of Earth, Wind & Fire’s ‘classic’ lineup and continues to perform with the band today. Maurice White also recruited trumpeter Leslie Drayton, guitarist Michael Beal, tenor saxophonist Chester Washington, percussionist Phillard Williams, and trombonist Alex Thomas. White now had the members he envisioned but the five


\(^{31}\) Bailey, 57.

aforementioned musicians left the band within two years. Earth, Wind & Fire signed with Warner Brothers Records in 1970 because of Maurice White and Philip Bailey’s comradery with Perry Jones, the first black national music promotion director in the history of the company.\textsuperscript{33}

Earth, Wind & Fire recorded their first album in 1970 for Warner Brothers: the self-titled \textit{Earth, Wind & Fire}. Their second album was also recorded on the same label in 1971. This album, \textit{The Need of Love}, produced the single, “I Think About Lovin’ You,” which provided the band their first top 40 R&B hit. Also in 1971, EWF performed the soundtrack to the Melvin Van Peebles film \textit{Sweet Sweetback’s Baadassss Song}.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1972, Maurice White decided to tweak the Earth, Wind, & Fire lineup again. He recruited the falsetto-voiced Philip Bailey from Denver, Colorado, who sings, plays congas and a little piano and harmonica. Bailey was a member of a little-known band called Friends & Love before joining Earth, Wind & Fire. Once Bailey was officially in the band, he joined in the audition process to recruit other members. Bailey had put in a good word for keyboardist, Larry Dunn, who is also from Denver, and Dunn was hired after a brief audition.\textsuperscript{35} Larry Dunn’s mother was Italian and his father was black. He was a child prodigy who learned to play the guitar, took piano lessons, and played the baritone horn and trombone in the school orchestra. His first love soon became the

\textsuperscript{33} Bailey, 48.


\textsuperscript{35} Bailey, 80.
organ. In addition to playing organ, synthesizer, piano, keyboards, and clarinet, Dunn handled the responsibilities of the band as musical director. He rehearsed the band for live stage performances and wrote many of the musical segues and medleys. 

A drummer, Ralph Johnson, from Los Angeles, California, also auditioned for the band. Johnson mainly played professionally within LA’s R&B and jazz circles. Johnson was hired by Verdine White because Maurice White was absent during his audition. By this time, five of the nine musicians who formed the core of Earth, Wind & Fire during its classic period (1973-1983) had been set in place: Maurice White, Verdine White, Philip Bailey, Larry Dunn, and Ralph Johnson. Jessica Cleaves, a classically trained vocalist and instrumentalist who at the time was singing with the group Friends of Distinction, was hired to replace Sherry Scott. For a few months, Maurice White employed Ronnie Laws to play the flute and saxophone and Roland Bautista was employed to play the guitar. Bautista rejoined the band in 1981.

Later in 1972, music mogul Clive Davis bought Earth, Wind & Fire’s contract from Warner Brothers and signed them to CBS/Columbia. On this new label, the band recorded their third album titled Last Days and Time. This album was the first to have

36 Ibid., 31.
38 Danois, 77.
39 Bailey 81-83.
Maurice White on the kalimba out front, another ‘voice’ to add to the band’s melody.\textsuperscript{40} The kalimba is an ancient African thumb piano. It is a very difficult instrument to play because it requires tremendous agility and power in the hands. Only a few artists have ever used the kalimba. The kalimba Maurice White used has an electric amplification pick-up and has been an integral part of the total sound of EWF.\textsuperscript{41}

White actually found inspiration for an African thumb piano from Phil Cohran. When he visited the Affro-Arts Theater, he became fascinated with Cohran’s unique instrument. Cohran had called his invention the frankiphone (named after his mother Frankie), an invention that became his calling card. White decided to refer to the instrument as the kalimba. Significantly, as believed by Clovis Semmes, Earth, Wind & Fire initially projected an African/Eastern rhythmic, tonal, and spiritual concept in their music similar to the music Phil Cohran produced at the Affro-Arts Theater.\textsuperscript{42}

In the latter part of 1972, the band personnel changed again. After Ronnie Laws left, Philip Bailey recommended Andrew Woolfolk, a horn player who played with him in Denver. Woolfolk could play flute as well as tenor and soprano saxophone. Woolfolk was studying with the famous bebop saxophonist Joe Henderson in New York. He auditioned for Earth, Wind & Fire and succeeded Ronnie Laws. Shortly thereafter, Roland Bautista (guitar) left the band. Johnny Graham and Al McKay were then hired as

\textsuperscript{40} Danois, 77.


\textsuperscript{42} Semmes, 458.
guitar players. Johnny Graham was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He began playing the guitar professionally at the age of 16. In college, Graham majored in music and developed his compositional skills to benefit his chief goal of writing. Al McKay was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. He began to play guitar at the age of five and he landed his first professional gig when he was eighteen. Before joining EWF, McKay worked with the Ike and Tina Turner Revue and Sammy Davis, Jr. With this new lineup, the band recorded their fourth studio album which ushered them into their classic period and profoundly showcased their unique philosophy.

The Black Arts Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the African-American Civil Rights Movement had given African Americans a newfound hope. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in 1968, many African-American artists, such as Earth, Wind, & Fire, believed that King’s dream could become reality. EWF preached a soul sermon on the theme that united the new black cities and the most serious sixties revolutionaries. This sermon was displayed on their next album.

43 Bailey, 115-116.
47 Ibid., 187.
Classic Period

In 1973, the spiritual message that Earth, Wind & Fire sought to communicate to their audience was found in the song “Head to the Sky” featured on the album by the same name: Head to the Sky. Obvious from this title is the concept of positive thinking for happiness, peace, and success. This concept gave EWF’s audience an attractive alternative to problems of self-identification and self-respect. This album encourages people to feel good about themselves and to relate to God and nature in all their forms. People get from the world what they put into it.48 While many African-American musicians were recording songs about the depressing social conditions in America, such as war, poverty, and racism, EWF recorded songs about love and freedom from life’s troubles. Although African Americans were living in an oppressive society, EWF chose to record songs about good times and infinite possibilities. Maurice White wanted to uplift humanity, so he created a band that represented universal truths.49 Those truths include love, wisdom, and justice.

Head to the Sky produced two top thirty R&B and top 60 pop charters: “Evil” and the album’s title track. These songs are the band’s first pop-charting singles.50 Head to the Sky was Jessica Cleaves’ last album with the band. She was released from the band


50 Danois, 77.
after she began missing gigs and getting sidetracked with certain substances. After her release, Maurice White decided to discontinue the female vocalist role in the band.\footnote{Bailey, 119.} The band recorded their next album in 1974.

Before Earth, Wind & Fire recorded \textit{Open Our Eyes}, Maurice White enlisted Freddie White, his younger half-brother and full-brother of Verdine White. Freddie White became a professional drummer at the age of 16 when he began playing with Donny Hathaway. Freddie White was hired as successor percussionist to Maurice White in 1974 when Maurice began to devote more time to writing and producing.\footnote{Ibid., 133.} With Fred White on board, the classic lineup of EWF was complete. This lineup primarily consists of nine musicians: Maurice White, Verdine White, Philip Bailey, Larry Dunn, Ralph Johnson, Andrew Woolfolk, Johnny Graham, Al McKay, and Freddie White. With the classic lineup in place, the band traveled to Caribou Ranch in the Rocky Mountains to record \textit{Open Our Eyes}.

\textit{Open Our Eyes} includes the 1958 gospel song by the same name. Teresa Reed describes “Open Our Eyes” as a prayer for peace and faith, which avoids the use of idiosyncratic jargon, or the words \textit{God, Jesus, or Christ}. Instead, the prayer is addressed to \textit{Father, Master,} and \textit{Lord}. When released in 1974, Earth, Wind, & Fire’s rendition of the song would have conjured familiar images of the traditional black church for many African-Americans. Its praise of universal virtues, however, is in keeping with White’s
more global inspirational agenda. The effect that making music in the mountains had on the spiritual energy of EWF was great. The message of faith in the good things life has to offer is the theme of “Devotion,” one of the band’s most beautiful ballads.

Another single from the album, “Mighty, Mighty,” is a rocking, rhythmical tune with the driving horn licks which have become a trademark of the Earth, Wind & Fire sound. Riding on the momentum of this album, the band recorded one of their most successful albums in the spring of 1975: That’s the Way of the World.

That’s the Way of the World was originally conceived as the soundtrack for the movie of the same name, which gave Earth, Wind & Fire its first appearance on film. The album held the number one pop spot for three weeks and scored a Rock Award for Best R&B Album. The gold single “Shining Star” won the band their first Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance by a Vocal Group. The title track from the album was released as the second single and gave the band their second Rock Award for Best R&B Single. Although used as a soundtrack, each of the songs from the album features lyrical and musical expression of the Earth, Wind & Fire ideals.

“Shining Star,” one of the band’s signature songs, propelled Earth, Wind & Fire to ‘cosmic heights’ when it became their first number one pop single. This achievement helped them gain mass crossover appeal. It is a song with a message which appeals to people from all walks of life. “Shining Star” reached number one simultaneously with

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53 Reed, 145-146.

*That’s the Way of the World.* The song relates the belief that everyone can shine bright like a star in his or her own way.

Earth, Wind, & Fire’s music directs the listener to look inside for a more personal salvation. Lines like “you will find peace of mind if you look way down in your heart and soul” from “That’s the Way of the World” are typical homiletic fare in the repertoire of Earth, Wind, & Fire. Their brand of evangelism is also universal in its appeal, as opposed to race or culture specific. Maurice White’s sermons transcend the boundaries of black America and its unique circumstance. His often-repeated directive to look inside for love, peace, and happiness is meant for all people listening everywhere.

Although Maurice White sought to enlighten the world with peace, hope, and love, there could be little question about where his specific religious sympathies lay. Earth, Wind, and Fire was able to attract a mainstream audience because the group obeyed the cardinal rule of crossing over: Avoid iconoclasm. Yet, there are moments where White’s religious preferences surface in the music with as much candor as they do in the many interviews he gave over the course of his career. One example is in “All About Love,” also released on *That’s the Way of the World.*

In this song, a spoken interlude announces the group’s religious philosophy. A generic essay on love suddenly turns to proselytizing when the speaker, Maurice White, explains: “We study all kinds of cults, sciences, astrology, mysticism, world religion, and so forth… coming from a hip place, all these things help because they give you insight into your inner self.” The sermonette then segues into a discussion on the virtues of self-love and self-esteem. The sedative musical accompaniment never misses a beat as this
weighty exhortation unfolds. That’s the Way of the World is definitely a memorable, classic album. Shortly thereafter, in the latter part of 1975, the Gratitude album was released.

Gratitude hit the stores in response to years of requests for a ‘live’ Earth, Wind & Fire album. In addition to the three sides of familiar material taken from live performances, Maurice White and coproducer Charles Stepney took the band into the studio to record all new songs for the fourth side. “Sing a Song,” Earth, Wind & Fire’s second gold single, comes from the studio material. “Sing a Song” implies there is a real purpose in music. It helps people get through pressures and bad times. “Can’t Hide Love,” another single from the studio sessions, was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Vocal Arrangement. To cap off 1975 as a banner year for Earth, Wind & Fire, they were voted Favorite R&B Group at the American Music Awards.

In 1975, funk artists were developing colorful stage shows. George Clinton of Parliament adopted the ‘mothership’ as a stage prop. Several funk-soul groups like the Sylvers, LaBelle, Isley Brothers, and Commodores wore futuristic rubberized shoulder pads and mirrored jump suits with pride, transmitting hugely flared funk signals from another, better world. Earth, Wind, & Fire used illusionists Doug Henning and David Copperfield to develop a stage show which rivaled the best of funk bands. On stage, the band conjured up links with Egyptology, African mysticism, and interplanetary travel to

55 Reed, 145-146.

show how their horn-led, and by mid-decade hugely successful, brand of joyous jazz-funk-soul recognized no barriers of time or place.

In funk music, the ‘mothership’ is the centerpiece of Afrocentricity and of escape. The original space traveler imagery had been created by Sun Ra. His indulgence in numerology, Egyptology, astrology, and a variety of cosmic insights introduced an intergalactic orientation to improvisational music.57 Brian Ward, author of *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*, wrote that in a sense, this mixture of escapism and utopianism was all part of a cultural response to the crisis which had enveloped the black liberation movement. Historically, what was significant about these visions was that by the early 1970s, it was only in outer space, or in a parallel world conjured up by religious mysticism, magic, drugs, or through some romanticized vision of a lost beatific, sometimes an African past, that it was really possible to site a coherent vision of interracial -- or even black -- harmony.58

The link between Sun Ra and many funk groups of the 1970s is clear. His unique spiritual potpourri surfaced in the costumes, stage props, and performance behavior of Earth, Wind & Fire.59 Like Sun Ra, Maurice White saw himself as a religious leader with a divine mandate. White forbade his band members to indulge in smoking, drinking, and eating most meat. Before each concert, White required twenty minutes of

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57 Vincent, 138.

58 Ward, 357.

59 Reed, 141.
meditation in a prayer circle. In various interviews throughout the 1970s, White announced his religious agenda.

In the November 8, 1976 issue of People, he states, “This band has a very positive effect on people… I feel we were elected to this by a higher force.” In a 1979 article for High Fidelity, he provides a thorough explanation of his mission. He states,

We feel that we are being used as a tool to say certain things…. Most black people walking in the streets are very unhappy, very depressed. I truly feel myself that love is the better way, that when you can get inside and reacquaint yourself with yourself, you can make yourself a better life. I try to make a better way for them so they can face each day with a positive attitude…. Because we are living in this jive society, we tend to relate to beautiful things – like the universe – in a very negative manner. So in the group we draw all of our forces from the universe, and from the Creator, and from the sky. Meditation is one way, though there’s other ways too. The group is very heavily into Egyptology. We felt that there were many secrets from that era that have never been totally worked out. Also that some of our spirituality and ideas relate to Egyptology… Our total concept is to create an illusionary effect in our public’s mind. We’re trying to reacquaint them with the Egyptian civilization so they can search and find out new things about themselves.60

Maurice White understood that ancient Egypt gave the world advanced civilization. He believed if modern man, especially African Americans, learned more about the culture and ideals of ancient Egypt, we could make the world a better place.61

In 1976, Maurice White decided to record a spiritual album. The Spirit album went multi-platinum and peaked at number two on the pop charts for two weeks in the fall of 1976. It boasted the hit single “Getaway,” which encourages listeners to use the

60 Reed, 144.

61 White, 148.
power of their minds in meditation to get away from the hassles of life, to relax, and to find themselves. *Spirit* is remembered as one of the band’s best albums and sadly for also being the last project of producer Charles Stepney. Stepney died on May 17, 1976, in Chicago, Illinois, at the age of 45. He was a former Chess Records arranger, producer, instrumentalist, songwriter, and White’s main collaborator on his Earth, Wind & Fire projects.\(^2\) *Spirit* is also the first Earth, Wind & Fire album to display Kemetic symbols on the cover. On the front cover, the nine band members are standing in front of three white pyramids reminiscent of the pyramids at Giza. The following album also displays Kemetic symbols on the outside cover and inside sleeve.

The album cover for *All ‘N All* is a visual representation of all that can be most easily expressed in music or painting: elements of changing times; symbols of those things which have most influenced human behavior, such as religion, arts, and sciences; and exciting visions of what the future holds for mankind.\(^3\) *All ‘N All* produced the hit singles “Serpentine Fire” and “Fantasy,” went multi-platinum, and won three Grammy Awards. It is Earth, Wind & Fire at their best. During this time, Maurice White produced several artists such as the Emotions and Deniece Williams. He also started his own record label, in the late 1970s, in association with Columbia called ARC. After having much success, the band produced a compilation album.

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In 1978, *The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. I* was released. The multi-platinum album featured some of the band’s greatest hit songs and three newly recorded singles. A cover of the Beatles’ “Got to Get You into My Life” went to number one on the R&B charts and number nine on the pop charts in the summer of 1978. The band performed the song in the movie *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.* Another new single, “September,” is featured on the album and made it to number one on the R&B charts and number eight on the pop charts in early 1978.64 “September” is the most requested song by fans of Earth, Wind & Fire. On the cover of this compilation album is the Kemetic god Heru (Horus). Heru is represented as a hawk holding the shen rings in its talons.

Heru is a symbol which can be seen on other things associated with the Earth, Wind & Fire. With Heru and other symbols, especially pyramids, the band made a studied effort to explore the musical and cultural links of Africa and America. According to Brian Ward, much of what passed for African influence had a pretty nebulous connection to any actual African music or techniques. These were musical gestures with a clearly understood racial point of origin. Functionally, they served to push soul music further towards the black end of the black-white musical spectrum in American popular music and thereby reflected the appeal of a new black nationalist consciousness.65

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64 Earth, Wind & Fire, “Biography.”

Wind & Fire continued to have phenomenal success for the rest of the 1970s. In 1979, *I Am* was released.

*I Am* features a simple but intriguing front album cover. The inside sleeve is more elaborate; it features ancient Egyptian symbols and symbols from other cultures surrounded by an image of the band dressed in stylish costumes. This multi-platinum album hit number three on the pop charts in the summer of 1979. It boasts the hit songs “In the Stone,” the million-selling, smash hit “Boogie Wonderland” with the Emotions, and the sultry, gold ballad “After the Love Is Gone.” Earth, Wind & Fire concluded the 1970s on a high and continued their success into the early 1980s.

In 1980, *Faces* was released. This is a double album cut after the band returned from a trip to Egypt. The front cover displays a familiar Kemetic symbol: a pyramid. Although the album produced three hits: “Let Me Talk,” “And Love Goes On,” and “You,” it only achieved gold status. But the band continued to produce good music. Their next album, *Raise*, was released in 1981.

*Raise* features the million-selling, mega-hit “Let’s Groove.” This song re-energized Earth, Wind & Fire’s career and helped *Raise* go platinum. *Raise* was the first album without the pop sensibilities of Al McKay. He left the band after the *Faces* album and he was the first member of the classic lineup to do so. The music video for

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66 Danois, 82.

67 Earth, Wind & Fire, “Biography.”

68 Danois, 82.
“Let’s Groove” was the first to air on the BET network. On the front cover of the album is a Kemetic female figure. Another female figure appears on the back cover. The band did not record another album until 1983.

*Powerlight* was released in the spring of 1983. This was Earth, Wind & Fire’s thirteenth album. Once again, the band was out to raise the conscious level of people by dealing with the bad times people pass through and put emphasis on universality and brotherhood.69 *Powerlight* includes the hit singles “Side by Side” and “Fall in Love with Me.” The music video for “Fall in Love with Me” displays a Kemetic landscape which propagates the band’s affection for Egyptology. The author became very intrigued when he first saw the video. It was the first time he saw ancient Egyptians on television portrayed as black people. In the history of Hollywood film, the ancient Egyptians were always portrayed by Caucasian actors. For example, in *The Ten Commandments*, the Egyptians (and Hebrews) were depicted as Caucasian people. In *Cleopatra*, Elizabeth Taylor portrayed the great Egyptian queen. The author understood the lyrics to the song, but wondered what most of the symbols meant. The author’s fascination with the video enhanced his extreme affection for Earth, Wind & Fire, who released another album in 1983 titled *Electric Universe*.

*Electric Universe* was released in the fall of 1983. The album sold fewer than 500,000 copies and stalled at number forty on the pop charts. This was a disappointment.

after the band’s multi-platinum success. CBS/Columbia was not happy and neither was Maurice White. After touring for nine years straight and releasing an album almost every year, sometimes two, White decided to put the band on hiatus.\textsuperscript{70} With this act, Earth, Wind & Fire’s classic period came to an end.

**Everything Must Change**

During the hiatus, Maurice White recorded a solo album and produced pop artists like Neil Diamond and Barbra Streisand. Philip Bailey, the vocalist with the stunning falsetto, also made solo albums. One of Bailey’s albums won a Grammy nomination in the Best Inspirational Performance category. Another went gold, launched the top-two, world-wide pop single, “Easy Lover,” which triggered a video that was nominated in nearly every category it was eligible for in the MTV Awards and won for Best Performance. But music lovers were wondering about Earth, Wind & Fire.

Suddenly, in October of 1987, a single called “System of Survival” hit airwaves from coast to coast. It had a vision, a transcendence and a mellifluousness that were unmistakable. With this single, Earth, Wind & Fire made a comeback. A month later, they released the album *Touch the World*, their first in four years.\textsuperscript{71} Soon thereafter, the band went on tour with a few new members. Since that time, Earth, Wind & Fire has continued to record music and tour the world.

\textsuperscript{70} Danois, 82.

In 1994, Maurice White stopped touring with Earth, Wind & Fire after being diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease, but he remained the heart and soul of Earth, Wind, & Fire as composer and producer. White reflected, “I wanted to create a library of music that would stand the test of time. ‘Cosmic Consciousness’ is the key component of our work. Expanding awareness and uplifting spirits is so important in this day. People are looking for more. I hope our music can give them some encouragement and peace.”

Sadly, Maurice White died on February 4, 2016, after his long battle with Parkinson’s Disease. The music industry and music fans all over the world suffered a tremendous loss.

Earth, Wind, & Fire continue to inspire people from all races with their music. They have given African Americans a new sense of racial pride and gave other races the hope for universal love. This band has shown the world the power and impact of ancient African philosophy, especially that of Kemet. They proved that African Americans have a true connection to one of the world’s most celebrated civilizations: Kemet. Although EWF are not as popular as they were in the 1970s and the early 1980s, they are still influential in the music industry. Their music has been sampled by many Hip Hop and R&B artists. Earth, Wind, & Fire is undoubtedly one of the greatest bands in the history of popular music.

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72 Earth, Wind & Fire, “Biography.”

Statement of the Problem

Earth, Wind & Fire has been criticized for their use of Kemetic symbols. People have often accused the band of displaying images which contain evil themes. Some people have even claimed that their songs contain subliminal messages. This has come from a lack of understanding of ancient African religion. African religion and art have often been cited as spooky and evil. Christian preachers have condemned EWF’s art. In his book *The Truth Behind Hip Hop* (2009), G. Craige Lewis describes the ankh (Kemetic symbol found in EWF’s visual art) as a demonic Egyptian symbol that predates Christianity. Lewis also writes that demonic spirits were the spiritual inspiration for EWF’s album covers and music. Bishop George Bloomer speaks about Earth, Wind & Fire in a sermon titled “Witchcraft in the Pews.” Bloomer states “Earth, wind, and fire are the elemental spirits that govern the occult. There was a group out in the ’70s called Earth, Wind & Fire. And do you know what their sign was? The pyramid. And all of their music was new age.” Bloomer is suggesting that the very name of EWF is evil and the pyramid symbol must be evil also. Wade Bailey wrote an article on a blog spot in which he describes the symbols used by EWF as very prominent symbols in Satanism and all forms of sorcery and witchcraft.

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In America and other Judeo-Christian societies, Egypt is depicted as the home of paganism, idolatry, and evil. In contrast, Judaism and Christianity are seen as hallmarks of monotheism, order, and righteousness. Donald Matthews, Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity and Black Church Studies at Colgate University, expounds on the perception of Egyptian spirituality. In biblical and world religion courses, students are taught that Egypt was the country that the Hebrews escaped from in order to develop a special relationship with the one true God. Egypt and most symbols associated with it have been relegated to irrelevance. Westerners believe any spirituality developed before Judaism and Christianity is evil and ignorant. Christians are taught to fear and despise Egyptian religion as the opposite of monotheism and the true faith.77

In Judeo-Christian societies, most people are not taught about the contributions the Egyptians have given to the Western world. This has led to a misconception of ancient Egyptian religion. Therefore, there is also a misunderstanding of Earth, Wind & Fire’s use of Egyptian symbols and the messages in their music. There needs to be more literature produced about the Kemetic influence on Christianity. Many Christians hardly speak about the black presence in the Bible. Christian textbooks should discuss more about the goodness of ancient Egypt found in the Bible. For example, Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, went to Egypt to find refuge during a famine. Joseph, son of Jacob sold into slavery by his brothers, became Viceroy to the Pharaoh of Egypt. In the New Testament, Joseph, the parent of Jesus, was instructed by an angel to take the baby

Jesus and his family to Egypt when Herod sought to kill all male Hebrew babies. There has not been enough literature produced about the goodness, ethics, and morality of Kemetic spirituality. The problem is a lack of knowledge about Kemetic culture.

**Purpose**

This research examines Earth, Wind & Fire’s use of Kemetic symbols in their visual art and the Kemetic themes found in the lyrics of some of their songs to provide a better understanding of Kemetic aesthetics and to provide the rationale for Earth, Wind & Fire’s use of Kemetic aesthetics. This research also examines why Maurice White, the founder of EWF, decided to use Kemetic symbolism and imagery. This research seeks to prove that EWF’s use of Kemetic imagery and symbolism has nothing to do with the promotion of evil while destroying the negative stereotype that Kemet was a “wicked” nation, and it counter argues the notion that the people of Kemet did not have a complex system of morality and ethics. This research explains how and why EWF was able to create sacred music in a secular space; this research seeks to exemplify the idea that spiritual messages can exist in secular genres outside gospel music and away from organized religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and especially, Christianity. The author seeks to present EWF in a positive light and inspire all people of different faiths to appreciate the band’s artistry, the way Maurice White intended. The research also seeks to encourage people to explore and examine different philosophies before being so quick to judge the unknown.
Rationale

According to Rickey Vincent, funk is deeply rooted in African cosmology – the idea that people are created in harmony with the rhythms of nature and that free expression is important to spiritual and mental health. Thus, funk in its modern sense is a deliberate reaction to – and rejection of – the Europeans’ predilection for formality, pretense, and self-expression. This research demonstrates the manner in which Earth, Wind & Fire exemplifies the true definition of funk. Their affection for Egyptology is a clear rejection of Western ideals.

In Western culture, there is a clear separation between spiritual and secular. Earth, Wind & Fire rejected this notion by incorporating spiritual messages into their lyrics. They also rejected the common use of Christian themes in their music and often used Ancient Egyptian themes instead. This research about Earth, Wind & Fire provides a better understanding of their music and funk music, in general.

Although there has been extensive research on the many genres of African-American music, from slavery to the 21st Century, it has not been customary to do extensive research on funk bands from the 1970s. Earth, Wind, & Fire is a prime example. This band has been featured in many books and magazines, but there has not been extensive research about their contributions to popular music. Since this band has not been examined extensively, particularly their use of Kemetic symbols, themes, and mysticism, many people have a misunderstanding of what the Kemetic aesthetics

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Vincent, 4-5.
represent. The research aims to not only provide information about Earth, Wind, & Fire’s benevolent use of Kemetic aesthetics, but to also seek to change the misconception about ancient African art and cosmology, in general. This research may encourage other scholars to conduct research on black popular music that was created during the Black Arts Movement. The author would also like for this research to encourage people to study various philosophies and spiritualities and not limit themselves only to the ideals that have been indoctrinated into them.

**Outline of Chapters**

The first chapter introduces Maurice White and the members of Earth, Wind & Fire during the classic period. This chapter also details what was happening in America, the significance of the Black Arts Movement, and how White was inspired to form his own band and the goals he had when it was formed. A brief discussion of funk music is given. The band’s rise to popularity is also discussed and why the author is compelled to conduct this research. The author’s desire to conduct this research was strengthened when literature pertaining to the group was reviewed.

The second chapter of this dissertation provides a review of literature which solidifies the need for this research. The literature review covers texts about the Black Arts Movement, funk music, soul music, popular music, and Earth, Wind & Fire, in particular, was reviewed. Literature about Kemetic ideals and spirituality was also reviewed. The sources about the Black Arts Movement, EWF, and different genres of
music do not provide crucial information that coincides with the topics of this research. After the review of literature, the theoretical framework and methodology are discussed.

The third chapter explains the theory of rhetoric and why it was chosen by the author. The methodology for studying the lyrics and the visual art is explained in this chapter. An analysis of the interviews in the research process is given and the research questions are presented. The methodology, content analysis, is connected to the fourth and fifth chapters. The fourth chapter examines the Kemetic themes shown in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art. This visual art includes album covers, music videos, concerts, and advertising products. EWF displayed images of Kemetic gods and monuments, such as pyramids and temples. The band also displayed other symbols, such as the ankh and the scarab. The fifth chapter examines the Kemetic themes found in the lyrics in some of the band’s songs. The final chapter provides a synopsis of the data presented in chapters four and five and seeks to help readers understand the dynamics of this research, as well as suggest further study of popular African-American music.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholars and popular culture critics have neglected to produce significant literature about Kemetic themes in the artistry of Earth, Wind & Fire. Many scholars and critics have categorized Earth, Wind & Fire’s music as funk, which is a subgenre of soul music. There has been a significant amount of literature written about funk. Funk music was developed in the 1960s and became popular during the Black Arts Movement. In funk music, several musicians acquired an enthusiasm for ancient African cosmology. There is a significant amount of literature about African cosmology in funk music. At the same time, there is a limited amount of information about Earth, Wind, & Fire’s employment of ancient Egyptian themes. This dissertation seeks to fill that void.

There are, however, some sources that contain marginal, and in some other instances, crucial information about Earth, Wind & Fire. Sources about different topics which may relate to Earth, Wind & Fire were reviewed to ascertain the limitations on the study of Kemetic themes used by the band. Literature about the Black Arts Movement, soul and funk music, popular music, and Earth, Wind & Fire, in particular, is reviewed. Literature about basic Egyptology is also reviewed.
**Black Arts Movement**

Literature about the Black Arts Movement and its relationship to African-American music is reviewed because during that period, many African-American musicians developed new strategies to propagate their agendas with their art. The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975) and the style of music developed during that time are discussed in a few books and journal articles. The famous book *Blues People* (1963) by Leroi Jones, later known as Amiri Baraka, analyzes each stage of social change in America through the music it produced. Amiri Baraka was a poet, playwright, novelist, critic, and political activist. He was best known for his highly acclaimed, award-winning play *Dutchman* and another play titled *The Slave, The Toilet*. Baraka also published numerous poetry collections. He is considered a pioneer of the Black Arts Movement. In *Blues People*, Baraka does not put any emphasis on names and details of any artists. This book is critical of mainstream culture, describing it as shallow and un-creative. Jones explains how the social conditions and race relations in America helped to create different genres of African-American music. Since this book was written in the early 1960s, it does not cover the music which developed during the Black Arts Movement, but it gives the reader an understanding of how soul and funk music could have developed.

One particular volume about the Black Arts Movement is *The Black Aesthetic* (1971), edited by Addison Gayle, Jr. This volume features literature by prominent black scholars, such as Hoyt Fuller, Larry Neal, Ron Wellburn, and others. The literature
consists of different topics, including music, poetry, drama, and fiction. Ron Wellburn wrote an article about black music called “The Black Aesthetic Imperative.”

Ron Wellburn is an English professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In this particular article, Wellburn shares the same rationale for black music as Amiri Baraka. He believes that black music has been the vanguard reflection of black feeling and the continuous repository of black consciousness. Wellburn argues that black music has a symbiotic relationship to black poetry, drama, and fiction, as well as painting, sculpture, and dance forms. Black music culture in America has attempted to maintain manifestations of its African heritage amid continual harassments against religious expression. Black culture cannot be separated from economic and political considerations. Nor can it be separated from its related creative/expressive forms.¹

Ron Wellburn’s article was first published in 1970. Therefore, it could not possibly critique the music of Earth, Wind & Fire’s classic period which began in 1973. However, based on Wellburn’s description of black music and culture, one can deduce that the art of Earth, Wind & Fire was influenced by the ideas of the Black Arts Movement. The use of Kemetic symbols was an attempt to connect with the African past. It was during the Black Arts Movement that many African Americans began adopting African names, wearing dashikis, and afros, and utilizing African imagery.

One popular book about the Black Arts Movement is New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement (2006), edited by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford. This

book includes essays examining well-known people, such as Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Also, this anthology expands the scope of the movement by featuring essays that explore the racial and sexual politics of the era, links with other cultural movements, the arts in prison, the role of HBCUs, photography, music, and more. However, this book fails to discuss the concepts of soul and funk music. It provides no specific information about the soul and funk musicians who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it does provide a definition of the “black aesthetic.” This book features an article titled “A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971” by Mary Ellen Lennon. Lennon is an assistant professor of history at Marian University and has a Ph.D. degree in history from Harvard University. Her research encompasses race, class, and culture in twentieth-century United States history. According to Lennon, the black aesthetic is the necessary effort to uncover and bear witness to the distinctive history and culture of people of African ancestry which had long been denied by America’s dominant white culture. The phrase “Black is Beautiful” held both a devastating critique of the psychic cost of racism and a cogent blueprint for personal and group self-definition. Embracing and celebrating “blackness” was the most important step to self-determination. Earth, Wind & Fire’s affection for ancient Egyptian imagery and symbolism may be considered a celebration of “blackness.”

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A significant book about the Black Arts Movement is *SOS – Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader* (2014), edited by John H. Bracey, Jr., Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst. This book includes works of fiction, poetry, and drama in addition to critical writings on issues of politics, aesthetics, and gender. Topics ranging from the legacy of Malcolm X and the impact of John Coltrane to the tenets of the Black Panther Party and the music of Motown are covered. The editors provide a substantial introduction outlining the nature, history, and legacy of the Black Arts Movement. However, this book does not examine the music of Earth, Wind & Fire or their contemporaries. This book does feature an article by Amiri Baraka about black music developed during the Black Arts Movement. According to Baraka, the music of that period presented a consciously proposed learning experience. Many of those musicians wanted to be “Spiritual Men” (Some of them embraced Islam), or else they were interested in the rise to spirit. It is expanding the consciousness of the given that they are interested in, not simply expressing what is already there. Those musicians were interested in the unknown: the mystical.³ This interest can be seen in the visual art of Earth, Wind & Fire. It could also be heard in the band’s lyrics.

An essential book which focuses on the Black Arts Movement and the black aesthetic is *The Black Seventies* (1970), edited by Floyd Barbour. Barbour was a playwright and author. He was an associate professor of English and Director of Afro-

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American Studies at Simmons College in Boston. Barbour also taught Afro-American Studies at Boston University. This volume covers essays discussing various topics on African-American culture, such as religion, art, Black Nationalism, and Pan Africanism. This book also examines the goals presented by African Americans during the Black Arts Movement. *The Black Seventies* gives the reader a true sense of black community and thought which existed in the early 1970s. It was in the 1970s when Earth, Wind, & Fire became popular. This book fails to discuss soul and funk music and hardly makes any references to musicians at all. There are also a couple of journal articles about the Black Arts Movement.

A crucial article about the Black Arts Movement is simply titled “The Black Arts Movement” (1968) by Larry Neal. Neal was a scholar of African-American theatre. He was known for working with Amiri Baraka to open the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School. This article was written in 1968 during the height of the Black Arts Movement. Neal argues that Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept and that the Black Arts and Black Power concepts both relate to the African American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood. Neal posits that both concepts are nationalistic. It was during the Black Arts Movement when African Americans began to define the world in their own terms. The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the removal of the white aesthetic, white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The Black aesthetic which developed during the Black Arts Movement is mostly predicated on an ethics which asks the question: Whose vision of the world is
more meaningful, the Blacks or the White oppressors? Earth, Wind & Fire answered this question by using ancient Egyptian themes in their visual art and lyrics. By using those themes, the band implied that the Black vision of the world is more meaningful for Black Americans.

The next article dealing with the Black Arts Movement is about the community artist, Phil Cohran, who had a profound effect on Maurice White, the founder of Earth, Wind & Fire. Phil Cohran is discussed in “The Dialectics of Cultural Survival and the Community Artist: Phil Cohran and the Affro-Arts Theater” (1994) by Clovis E. Semmes. Semmes is Professor Emeritus at Eastern Michigan University and has a Ph.D. degree in sociology from Northwestern University. His interests and expertise include systemic inequality, African-American institutions and social processes, and African-American popular and expressive culture. In this article, Semmes presents Phil Cohran as an artist who exemplifies a self-conscious commitment to uplifting the quality of African-American life and intellect while resisting countervailing political and market forces. Cohran founded the Affro-Arts Theater on Chicago’s south side in 1967. The theater was a focal point for a growing Black consciousness among African Americans in Chicago. Maurice White spent a great deal of time at the Affro-Arts Theater when he lived in Chicago. He observed the rehearsals and performances of Phil Cohran at the theater. This article provides an understanding of how Maurice White, the founder of

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Earth, Wind & Fire, acquired his affection for ancient Egypt but does not give information about ancient Egyptian themes used by EWF.

**Earth, Wind & Fire**

There are two books that have been written primarily about Earth, Wind & Fire: the autobiographies of Maurice White and Philip Bailey. In *My Life with Earth, Wind & Fire*, Maurice White tells why he decided to form his own band. He explains how he became successful and he discusses his failures. He also mentions secretive issues about his personal life. He explains his decision to use Kemetic symbols and his passion for Egyptology. White believed the civilized world started in Egypt and not in Europe. He also believed Egyptology would encourage self-respect for African Americans. This book gives an understanding of the mysticism of Maurice White. Philip Bailey also details his experiences with Earth, Wind & Fire.

In *Shining Star*, Philip Bailey chronicles his experiences as the lead singer of Earth, Wind, & Fire. He describes how the band was formed and how he was recruited into it. He also describes Maurice White’s concept that signified universal love and spiritual enlightenment. Bailey writes about the band’s rise to stardom and his own professional and spiritual journey. He also discusses the joy and pain of musical success. This book gives insight to the experiences of black musicians in the pop music industry.

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This autobiography is useful for research about Earth, Wind, & Fire because it is the testimony of a man who has been a member of the band since 1972. Literature which solely focused on Earth, Wind & Fire can also be found in articles.

There have been several newspaper and magazine articles that have been written about Earth, Wind & Fire. These articles basically give short biographies of the band or provide a praiseworthy critique. One magazine article is “Cosmic Heights” by Ericka Blount Danois, published in *Wax Poetics*, 2011. In this article, Blount gives a biography of EWF and writes about the band’s rise to world-renowned success and what made them unique to their contemporaries. Danois argues that Maurice White wanted audiences to take a higher path and reach the divine.\(^8\) His audiences reached the divine by transcending time. Although she points out the mysticism of EWF, she does not focus on the band’s use of Kemetic symbolism and aesthetics. Articles about EWF have also been written in *Billboard Magazine*.

To celebrate Earth, Wind & Fire’s 30\(^{th}\) anniversary, *Billboard Magazine* published a commemorative issue in July 2001. This issue features four articles written about the band. In the first article titled “Grooving to 30 years of Earth, Wind & Fire,” Don Waller gives a short discussion of the band’s creation and its rise to superstardom. He describes EWF’s concerts as a heady brew of racial pride, African consciousness, spiritual unity, and industrial-strength light and magic.\(^9\) Waller also lists ten of EWF’s

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\(^8\) Ericka Blount Danois, “Cosmic Heights,” *Wax Poetics*, July/August 2011, 82.

hit songs during its classic period. The second article discusses the band’s continued success in the 21st century.

In “In the Works,” Rhonda Baraka discusses the release of Earth, Wind & Fire’s documentary, *Shining Stars*, which traces the band’s history. Baraka mentions the recording of the EWF’s 23rd album that was due for release in 2002 and touring commercials that were in the works. Baraka notes that although the music industry was changing, EWF’s songs still focused on spirituality and life. She also gives commentary by musicians David Foster and Wyclef Jean. Baraka wrote another article for this Billboard issue.

Rhonda Baraka’s other article is titled “A Conversation with Verdine White, Philip Bailey and Ralph Johnson.” Baraka begins by exclaiming that Earth, Wind & Fire’s music has been essential to raising our collective consciousness and quenching our spiritual thirst as the elements (earth, wind, fire) themselves are to our very existence. The article is basically an interview with White, Bailey, and Johnson. These three musicians have been with Earth, Wind & Fire since its classic period and they have remained the core of the band since Maurice White stopped touring. In this conversation, they discuss their enlightenment, the band’s transition, and the challenge of Maurice White’s decision to stop touring. The last article in this special issue is an interview with Maurice White.

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The last article is simply titled “Maurice White” and it was written by Gail Mitchell. In this interview, Maurice White reflects on Earth, Wind & Fire’s longevity and reveals what makes the band’s sound so successful. At the end of the article, commentary is given by music executives Clive Davis and Bob Cavallo and musician India Arie. Arie states, “The spirituality in their music and the symbolism of their album covers are so moving. The chakras, the colors and the pyramids. I love them all for that!”

Neither this article nor any of the others discusses the band’s affection for ancient Egypt.

**Funk Music**

Since Earth, Wind & Fire is considered a funk band by some scholars, literature about funk music is useful for this study. There is a significant number of books written about funk music. *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture* (2008), edited by Tony Bolden, is a scholarly collection which discusses American funk music and examines the intricate and complex nature of the word and music by the same name. Tony Bolden is an associate professor of African and African-American Studies at the University of Kansas and holds a Ph.D. degree from Louisiana State University. His teaching and research interests include African-American music, African-American cultural studies, popular culture, African literature, and ethnic-African American literature. This volume employs various methodologies to examine funk’s

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relationship to African-American culture and to music, literature, and visual art as a whole. This book focuses on certain funk artists, such as James Brown and Bootsy Collins, but this volume fails to discuss the unique style of EWF.

Another book about funk music is *Funk: The MUSIC, the PEOPLE, and the RHYTHM of THE ONE* (1996) by Rickey Vincent. Vincent is an author, historian, and radio host. He received his Ph.D. degree in ethnic studies at University of California at Berkeley. Vincent is a lecturer at University of California at Berkeley, City College of San Francisco, and California College of the Arts in Oakland and has appeared on television documentaries involving African-American music and culture. In this book, Vincent celebrates Funk and gives it the attention that other black music genres have experienced. He also explains the different categories of funk and how it is related to ancient African culture. Vincent praises Funk artists, such as James Brown, Parliament, Rick James, and Earth, Wind & Fire. According to Vincent, EWF was the epitome of funk because they utilized the African motif and the theme of unity. EWF exemplified the living fusion of traditions that had been on a collision course for a generation. The gospel love, the glitter of solid-gold soul, the informed jazz brilliance, and rooster-poot funk at its zenith took the black music tradition to its highest heights and remains the standard.12 Although Vincent praises EWF and mentions the African motif, he does not give specific details about the ancient Egyptian themes used by the band.

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A third book about funk music is *Funk: Third Ear – The Essential Listening Companion* (2001) by Dave Thompson. Thompson is an English author who has written more than 100 books, mostly dealing with rock and pop music. He has written regularly for journals including *Melody Maker, Rolling Stone,* and the *All Music Guide.* This particular book traces funk from its James Brown roots to funk artists of the twenty-first century, like the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Alongside detailed artist biographies, anecdotes and discographies, this book also reviews and rates 1500 recordings that illustrate each artist’s sound and musical impact. Artists covered include George Clinton, Herbie Hancock, Prince, and of course, Earth, Wind & Fire. This book provides a thorough biography of EWF. It also refers to one trademark of the band: Egyptian-flavored album covers, which echoed their stage shows and helped shape perceptions of the band’s music itself. However, this book fails to give specific details about the album covers or Egyptian themes found in the songs.

There are also dissertations about funk music reviewed for this research. The first dissertation reviewed is “Who Got Da Funk?: An Etymophony of Funk Music from the 1950s to 1979” (2005) by Robert Davis. Davis received his Ph.D. degree in Musicology at the University of Montreal in 2005. This dissertation presents an etymophony of funk which traces the development of the genre through an investigation of the sonic text. The term ‘etymophony’ denotes a means of studying the origin of an item of sonic signification. Etymophony distinguishes the study of sonic material from literary

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material as found in etymology. Etymology is defined as “The tracing out and describing the elements of a word with their modifications of form and sense.” Davis argues that the etymology of a word is usually found in any good dictionary, but music has no equivalency and little is known about the elements of music and their origin as compared to language.\textsuperscript{14} The framework provides a basis for understanding how the network of intertextual musical relationships, within their sociocultural context, act as points of departure for stylistic and genre formations. These stylistic formations are traced through an analysis of literature on funk music. Davis makes no mention of Earth, Wind & Fire and their unique style.

The second dissertation about funk music is “Funk My Soul: The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Birth of Funk Culture” (2013) by Domenico R. Ferri. Ferri received his Ph.D. degree in history at Loyola University Chicago in 2013. In this dissertation, Ferri argues that the assassination of Dr. King, Jr. inspired musicians, producers, artists, and consumers in America to reconstruct soul music and, in its place, construct the cultural idiom known as funk. Ferri argues that the funk movement developed as an alternative to the more militant Black Freedom Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{15} He highlights funk musicians, management, critics, and fans while demonstrating how these individuals derived inspiration from Dr. King, Jr.’s legacy.


\textsuperscript{15} Domenico R. Ferri, “Funk My Soul: The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Birth of Funk Culture” (doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2013), vii.
Ferri examines how several African-American musicians reacted to the death of Dr. King, Jr., but he excludes a discussion about Earth, Wind & Fire.

The last dissertation about funk music is “We Getting Funky on the Scene: Improvisation and Live Performance in Funk Music” (2012) by Matthew Bryan Valnes. Valnes received his Ph.D. degree in music at the University of Pennsylvania in 2012. This dissertation highlights and examines the types of performative and interpretive networks that are created during live performance of funk music, viewed through an improvisational lens. This dissertation articulates the networks that can come about as musicians and audience members interact during live performances. Valnes examines a live Earth, Wind & Fire performance of the hit song “Reasons.” He critiques the call and response technique of the lead singer and the horn player, but he does not discuss the African motifs used in EWF concerts.

In addition to the dissertations, there is also a thesis about funk music titled “Funk is its Own Reward: An Analysis of Selected Lyrics in Popular Funk Music of the 1970s” (2008) by Travis K. Lacy. Lacy received his Master of Arts degree in African-American Studies from Clark Atlanta University in 2008. This thesis examines popular funk music as the social and political voice of African-Americans during the 1970s. Lacy reveals the messages found in the lyrics of funk songs as they commented on the climate of the times for African Americans of the 1970s. This research concludes that popular funk music lyrics espoused the sentiments of African Americans as they utilized a culturally familiar vernacular and prose to express the evolving sociopolitical themes and conditions of the
period. This thesis discusses one popular song by Earth, Wind & Fire: “Getaway.” The message in the lyrics implies the conditions in the 1970s forced African Americans to remove themselves from white mainstream society. The song’s lyrics were revealing in their theme of escapism.\(^\text{16}\) Lacy does not argue that the theme of escapism is related to Egyptology.

Funk music is also discussed in journal articles. One of the most useful articles about funk music is “Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of a Post-Civil Rights Movement Counterculture” (2011) by Kesha M. Morant. Morant is Assistant Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Pennsylvania State University and holds a Ph.D. degree in communication and culture from Howard University. Her research interests include popular media examined through a cultural lens. In this article, Morant posits that funk music of the 1970s and 1980s was the social protest discourse of poor and working-class African-American youth after the euphoria of the African-American Civil Rights Movement faded. This article confirms that funk music developed during the Black Arts Movement which grew out of the African-American Civil Rights Movement. According to Morant, the musical content of funk encompassed self-empowerment, celebration, and self-love. It paved the way for improved self-esteem and community esteem, challenged social norms and created an

avenue for self-definition. Self-empowerment and self-love are themes found in the lyrics of Earth, Wind & Fire, but this article makes no mention of EWF. In addition to literature specifically about funk music, literature about different forms of African-American music is reviewed.

**African-American Music**

Funk music has been described as a fusion of different genres of African-American music. For that reason, literature about African-American music, in general, is reviewed. The music of Earth, Wind & Fire has been called Soul, R&B, as well as Funk. It has even been referred to as Disco. These four genres became popular during the latter part of the twentieth century. The evolution of soul music is examined in a journal article by Robert W. Stephens.

In “Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music,” (1984) Robert W. Stephens explains how soul music is rooted in African culture, its relationship to social changes in America, and the different styles which developed over time. It can also be argued that soul is rooted in European culture as well (for example, language and instruments). Stephens details popular soul artists, such as Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, but he does not discuss popular soul bands of the 1970s, such as Earth, Wind & Fire. However, he lists EWF as one of the few groups who

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developed concepts and trends based on the soul tradition developed during the 1960s. Literature about African-American music in books is also reviewed.

There have been a significant number of books and articles written about African-American music. One book about different genres of African-American music is *America’s Black Musical Heritage* (1984) by Tilford Brooks. In this text, Brooks explains how Black music is constantly changing and its impact on mainstream American music. The black musician is studied against the social, political, economic, and religious influences of each period in American history. This book also profiles a selection of black composers and presents their popular compositions. Brooks examines Black music from slavery to the late 20th century. This book was published in 1984, one year after the end of Earth, Wind & Fire’s classic period. Surprisingly, there is no mention of Earth, Wind & Fire or funk music, in general. This book is similar to *The Music of Black Americans: A History* by Eileen Southern.

In *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (1997), Eileen Southern chronicles the development of African-American music, from the arrival of the first Africans in the North American English colonies to the end of the twentieth century. Southern was an African-American musicologist, researcher, author, and teacher. She was the first African-American woman to be appointed a tenured, full professor at Harvard University. This book includes extensive bibliographies and discographies to help navigate the material. Unfortunately, this book does not put much emphasis on the music from the modern era, such as soul, disco, funk, and hip hop. Funk music is only mentioned in one
sentence and Earth, Wind & Fire is not mentioned at all. However, there are some books which discuss Earth, Wind & Fire and funk music. These topics are often discussed in books which focus on African-American music created during the latter half of the twentieth century.

African-American popular music of the second half of the twentieth century is the focus of *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues* (2009) by Richard J. Ripani. Ripani is a faculty member at Hume-Fogg Academic High School in Nashville, Tennessee. He is also a professional musician and songwriter. This book traces the development of R&B music from 1950 to 1999 by closely analyzing the top 25 songs from each decade. The music of Earth, Wind, & Fire is primarily discussed in the decade of the 1970s. According to Ripani, Earth, Wind & Fire was one of the most important funk bands of the 1970s because their musical style crossed many boundaries. This book focuses on the musical sounds of artists as opposed to the lyrics of the artists. There is no mention of the visual and lyrical aesthetics of EWF.

Another book about African-American music is *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (1998) by Brian Ward. The author examines the connection between African-American music and race relations between Black and White Americans. This book begins with R&B music of the 1950s and ends with the militant hip-hop groups of the 1990s. Ward provides an understanding of the popular Soul and Funk music of the 1970s. Ward describes Earth, Wind & Fire’s stage shows as conjuring up links with Egyptology, African mysticism and interplanetary
travel. Although Ward mentions Egyptology, he does not discuss any Egyptian symbols or spiritual themes.

Like the aforementioned work, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, & the Soul of America* (2006) by Craig Werner is a book that details how race relations coincided with black popular music. Werner is professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin and author of many books. He received a Ph.D. degree in English from the University of Illinois and has written liner notes for re-releases of classic soul albums. Some of his other works are *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and the Rise and Fall of American Soul, Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse, and We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*. In *A Change Is Gonna Come*, Werner explains how music has the power to bring people together. He also discusses major topics found in Earth, Wind & Fire’s songs: self-love and universal love. But Werner does not provide a solid discussion about EWF. He only writes about the band in snippets throughout the book.

One book that is similar to Craig Werner’s book is *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (1999) by Mark Anthony Neal. Neal is professor of Black Popular Culture in the Department of African and African-American Studies at Duke University. He has written extensively on black popular culture and the history of popular music. This book is a scholarly work that details how black music changed with the social conditions of African-Americans. Neal explains how the Civil
Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the Black Arts Movement had a profound effect on many popular artists. Unfortunately, the only funk artist Neal goes into great detail about is Parliament/Funkadelic. Earth, Wind & Fire is only mentioned in one sentence.

A crucial book that chronicles African-American music from slavery to the present is *Makings of a Black Music Philosophy: An Interpretive History from Spirituals to Hip Hop* (2010) by William Banfield. Banfield is Professor of Africana Studies/Music and Society at Berklee College of Music. He received his D.M.A. from the University of Michigan, and he is the consulting editor of the African American Cultural Theory and Heritage series for Scarecrow Press. In this book, Banfield engages the reader in a conversation about the aesthetics and meanings of black popular music. He covers all genres of African-American music, from slavery to the 21st Century. This book discusses how black music has been used during different conditions of certain time frames. It provides a philosophical framework for those who study the traditions and development of Black music. Banfield describes Earth, Wind & Fire as a band who based their art and philosophy on intergalactic, futuristic Egyptian costumes and popular, semispiritual philosophies that may have been influenced by Sun Ra.18 Surprisingly, Banfield gives no details about EWF’s Egyptian aesthetics.


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Bogdanov. Bogdanov is a music critic, AllMusic editor, and record producer. This book is a comprehensive guide for fans of R&B music. Vladimir Bogdanov offers entertaining and informative reviews that lead readers to the best recordings by their favorite artists and help them find new music to explore. Informative biographies and essays trace the growth of R&B from its roots in blues and gospel to its many branches today. Fortunately, information about Earth, Wind, & Fire is found in this volume. EWF is praised as one of the most influential bands of the late 1970s. Artists who had no connection to EWF were claiming Maurice White and his bandmates as a major influence. Some of those artists were Chocolate Jam Company, and Experience Unlimited, and Free Life.¹⁹

Profiles of Earth, Wind & Fire can be found in other books about African-American popular music. One book is *Icons of Black Music: A History in Photographs 1900 – 1999* (1999) by Charlotte Greig. Greig was a British novelist, playwright, singer, and songwriter. This book captures the essence of famous musical artists and their cultural significance. It includes influential performers like James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and of course, Earth, Wind & Fire. Each artist is featured with a short biography highlighting the artist’s achievements. EWF is described as one of the most successful bands in black music who appealed to both black and white audiences when racial divisions were incorporated in popular music. EWF’s music has an upbeat optimism.

which makes it attractive across the board. As stated previously, the biography is very short and does not include a discussion about ancient Egyptian themes in the band’s lyrics and visual art, although Maurice White’s interest in Egyptology and astrology is noted.

Earth, Wind & Fire’s achievements are also detailed in *This Day in African-American Music* (1993) by Ted Holland. For each day of the year, a popular African-American artist born on that date is profiled. For December 19th, Maurice White and Earth, Wind & Fire are discussed because December 19th is Maurice White’s birthdate. This book features musical artists from all genres of African-American music. There are so many artists featured and the author does not provide specific details about the philosophies of the artists.

A unique approach to black popular music can be found in *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (2003) by Teresa Reed. Reed is Professor of Music at the University of Tulsa. She received her Ph.D. degree from Indiana University and her research interest is African-American music. In this book, Reed examines religious and spiritual themes found in black secular music. She discusses the link between West African music and African-American music. Reed explains how western culture has not been able to completely damage the heritage of African music, and she shares much information about Maurice White’s affection for Egyptology. This book is extremely useful for this research, because Earth, Wind, & Fire appears to be a musical entity which

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often focused on conveying spiritual messages. Their brand of evangelism is universal in its appeal, as opposed to being race or culture specific. Maurice White’s sermons transcend the boundaries of black America and its unique circumstance. White’s message of peace, love, and happiness is meant for listeners everywhere.\(^{21}\) The messages of African-American musicians are also discussed in journal articles.

One article that examines the lyrics of African-American music is “Message in the Music: Political Commentary in Black Popular Music from Rhythm and Blues to Early Hip Hop” (2005) by James B. Stewart. Stewart investigates misinterpretations of the manner in which R & B influenced listeners’ political engagement during the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. According to Stewart, spiritual transcendence commentaries began to proliferate in the early and mid-1970s. Spiritual transcendence advocates spiritual enlightenment to raise the consciousness of the people.\(^{22}\) Spiritual transcendence is exemplified in Earth, Wind & Fire’s “Keep Your Head to the Sky” and “That’s the Way of the World.” These are songs that encourage listeners to be optimistic in a troubled world.\(^{23}\) Although Stewart acknowledges EWF’s mission for positivity, he does not mention the band’s connection to Egyptology.

An article that is useful in studying the music of Earth, Wind & Fire is “Fakin’ It/Makin’ It: Falsetto’s Bid for Transcendence in 1970s Disco Highs” (1995) by Anne-

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23 Ibid., 215.
lise Francois. Francois is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California Berkeley. In this article, Francois examines the use of the male falsetto voice in disco music. She implies that some male artists consciously used the falsetto to reach the heights which they sang about in their popular songs. In addition to other popular artists of the disco era, Francois discusses two Earth, Wind & Fire songs: “Shining Star” and “Fantasy.” For EWF, the simulating and literalizing of transcendence through falsetto is not the exception, but the rule. The band uses falsetto everywhere to do and reach the heights and highs about which they are singing. This article is mainly about the use of the falsetto, but Francois recognizes the underlying themes in the music of EWF.

The third article discussing African-American music is “Extensions on a Black Musical Tropology: From Trains to the Mothership (and beyond)” (2011) by Horace J. Maxile, Jr. Maxile is Assistant Professor of Music Theory at Baylor University. His primary research interests include musical semiotics, jazz analysis, and concert music by African-American composers. In this article, Maxile draws the connections between gospel trains, soul trains, and the ‘mothership’ evoked by funk musician George Clinton. Maxile demonstrates how the use of the train has expanded over time and genres while also exploring different manifestations of freedom and liberation motifs found in secular and sacred music. Maxile argues that the mothership signifies freedom and liberation. The same can be suggested for the flying pyramids which Earth, Wind & Fire often used
in their concerts. But Maxile does not mention any ancient Egyptian motifs used by Earth, Wind & Fire.

**Popular Music**

There are books that focus on different genres of popular music which are not specific to African Americans. These are genres that developed during Earth, Wind, & Fire’s classic period. One book is *Disco, Punk, New Wave, Heavy Metal, and More: Music in the 1970s and 1980s* (2012), edited by Michael Ray. This book examines all types of music that were popular during the 70s and 80s, including disco, funk, and punk. This book profiles the artists who captured the spirit of rapid social and cultural change, including EWF. It gives a short biography of EWF and argues that Maurice White’s affection for Egyptology helped to embellish the band’s unique image. Although Egyptology is mentioned, there are no analyses of any ancient Egyptian themes used by EWF. This text is similar to *Popular Music in America*.

In *Popular Music in America: The Beat Goes On* (2012), Michael Campbell provides a chronological examination of the roots and history of American popular music from 1840 to the 21st Century. Michael Campbell is a professional writer and designer with a degree in graphic design and communications. This book focuses on basic music fundamentals as well as elements of each style. There is also a focus on the heritage and diversity of popular music, the underlying kinship of its many styles, and the evolution of popular music from minstrel show music to Hip Hop. Unlike many other books reviewed for this dissertation, this book also deals with the music that was birthed out of African-
American culture as well as Anglo-American culture. This book gives a brief synopsis of Earth, Wind & Fire and praises the unique ‘sound’ of the band. It makes no mention of the visual art or lyrical content.

Earth, Wind, & Fire is also profiled in Night Moves: Pop Music in the Late 1970s (2000). This book, written by two brothers, Don and Jeff Breithaupt, focuses on the artists who were most popular during the latter part of the 1970s and who were the most influential. In this book, Earth, Wind, & Fire is praised as being one of the most, progressive and inventive bands of that decade. This book tells a story of high-school students attending an EWF concert in 1981. Two Canadian students saw EWF perform live at Maple Leaf Gardens during their tour to support the Faces album and they were instilled with boundless optimism. Earth, Wind & Fire is praised for being able to match or surpass their recording while performing live. However, there is no analysis of Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art.

Popular music is also the focus of a complex article titled “Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music” (2003) by Ken McLeod. This article explores the relationship between the uses of space, alien, and techno futuristic themes in popular music. Popular music from the second half of the twentieth century is discussed. McLeod examines how popular artists used space imagery to promote various ideologies.

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ranging from African-American empowerment to gay and lesbian agendas. This article is useful for analyzing the use of spacecraft imagery in funk music, such as the ‘mothership.’ This Afro-futuristic art is typically concerned with black nationalism and empowerment and the creation of mythologies based on the confrontation between historical prophetic imagination, such as ancient Egyptian theories of the afterlife and modern alienated existence. Although McLeod mentions Egyptian theories, he makes no reference to Earth, Wind & Fire.

As the aforementioned books and articles suggest, Earth, Wind & Fire has become an icon in American and global popular culture. These sources also help to solidify the need for a study of ancient Egyptian themes in the lyrics and visual art of EWF. To complete this research, more literature is reviewed.

**Ancient Egyptian Aesthetics**

An important topic employed for this research is ancient Egyptian culture. Literature about ancient Egyptian art, spirituality, and cosmology is crucial for this research. There is an abundance of literature about ancient Egypt and several books are used. The first book used for this dissertation is *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization* (1992) by Anthony Browder, an author, publisher, cultural historian, and artist. He is a graduate of Howard University’s College of Fine Arts and has traveled to Egypt 47 times since 1980. In this book, Browder explains the many concepts in the Nile Valley,

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including the land that is now called Egypt. He confirms that many ideas Westerners claim as their own started in Egypt. Browder focuses on the art, literature, religion, and science that made the Nile Valley a great civilization. He argues that “no other nation in world history has had a greater influence on the arts and sciences than Kemet, and it is there where one can still find the only remaining one of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.”

Another scholar who supports the notion that western civilization came from African ideas is Cheikh Anta Diop.

In *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1967), Cheikh Anta Diop argues that ancient Egyptian civilization started in inner Africa and this civilization gave birth to European civilization. Diop was a Senegalese historian and anthropologist who was the director of the radiocarbon laboratory at I.F.A.N. at the University of Dakar. In this book, he provides evidence, such as skulls, melanin dosage, and language analysis as evidence that ancient Egypt was a black nation. This supports Maurice White’s notion that civilization began in Africa. Other scholars who shared the same views as Diop are featured in *Egypt Revisited*, edited by Ivan Van Sertima.

*Egypt Revisited* (1989) features discourse by Cheikh Anta Diop, Theophile Obenga, Runoko Rashidi, Asa Hilliard, Maulana Karenga, etc. This book provides evidence to prove the ancient Egyptians were black Africans. Ivan Van Sertima declared

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the African claim to Egyptian civilization rests upon a large body of evidence. Some is cultural. Some is linguistic, and some is physical.\textsuperscript{29} Of course, Diop’s archaeological work is examined. Obenga discusses Kemetic spirituality. Rashidi provides images of ancient Egyptian statues which clearly depict the ancient Egyptians as Africans with thick lips and wide noses. Hilliard also argues that statues and carvings display the ancient Egyptians as indigenous African people and he provides a chronology of Egypt’s “golden ages”: Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom. There are featured in this book other scholars who discuss the great accomplishments of the ancient Egyptians, such as the Great Pyramid, the Great Sphinx, tombs, philosophy, and art. Asa Hilliard also provides insight about the study of ancient Egypt in an article from \textit{Phylon}.

In “The Meaning of KMT (Ancient Egyptian) History for Contemporary African American Experience (1992),” Hilliard explained how the study of ancient Egypt evolved during the closing of the nineteenth century and continued through the end of the twentieth century. Hilliard argued that two concepts are fundamental challenges to the racist scholarship associated with the European colonial period. Those two concepts are:

1. Kemet (ancient Egypt) from its beginning and during its greatest periods of cultural development was an indigenous black African civilization. Its birthplace was inner Africa.
2. Kemet remained culturally unified with the rest of ancient Africa. African cultures have more similarities than differences. As a result, Kemet must be considered as an African classical civilization.\textsuperscript{30}

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Hilliard also explained how Europeans became so interested in Kemet and how scholars of African descent and European scholars began to challenge the racist idea that Kemet could not have been achieved by black Africans. Hilliard exclaimed that we must recognize that Kemet is the world’s oldest recorded classical civilization and it influenced world culture. Another scholar who argued that Ancient Egypt was a major influence for other civilizations is George James.

In *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy Is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy* (1954), George James claimed that Greek philosophy originated in ancient Egypt. James describes the complex Egyptian spiritual system called the Mysteries, which was also the first system of salvation. He claimed that many religious leaders were initiates of the Egyptian Mysteries, including Moses and Jesus. James explained how the Greeks invaded Egypt and how they came to be falsely known as the creators of philosophy. James’s claims were supported by Martin Bernal.

In *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985)* (1987), Martin Bernal was the grandson of the great English Egyptologist, Alan Gardiner. Bernal argued that advanced civilization did not start in Europe, but in Africa. Bernal claimed that Greek culture was heavily influenced by Kemetic culture. He identified two theoretical models to explain the history of Greece and its relationship to Europe. The ancient model remained popular until the eighteenth century. Until that time, history and legend stated that Greek civilization originated in

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Kemet. The second model, called the Aryan model was invented by German and British professors. Without any empirical evidence, they claimed that Greek civilization was started by Caucasians. Bernal provides a fair study of the historical record. Egyptian culture is also discussed by Bernal’s grandfather, Alan Gardiner.

*Egypt of the Pharoahs* (1961) by Alan Gardiner is a crucial book on ancient Egyptian culture. Gardiner was an English Egyptologist who is regarded as one of the premier Egyptologists of the 20th century. In this book, Gardiner provides a history of this civilization from its earliest days to its conquest by Alexander in 332 BC. He discusses the Egyptian language, writing, land, resources, its neighbors, and the Egyptians’ method of calculating time and dates. Gardiner produced another extensive book that has been used as a textbook on hieroglyphics titled *Egyptian Grammar*.

*Egyptian Grammar* (1996) by Alan Gardiner is perhaps the most extensive text on ancient Egyptian writing. It is widely known that the ancient Egyptians used picture symbols known as hieroglyphs to write their language. Gardiner explained that hieroglyphic writing is an offshoot of pictorial art, a very early and important function of which was to provide a visible record of facts and occurrences. Gardiner provided an understanding of the hundreds of symbols used in the ancient Egyptian language. This text also provides an understanding of the world view of the ancient Egyptians by giving numerous examples of popular ancient Egyptian phrases and ideas. Elements of Kemetic culture are also discussed in two books by Richard H. Wilkinson.

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Richard H. Wilkinson is an archaeologist in the field of Egyptology. He is Regents Professor Emeritus, at the University of Arizona and founding director of the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition. In *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (2000), Wilkinson traces the processes of construction and decoration of the temples and how they functioned. Some temples served primarily as houses of the gods while others served the spirits of deceased kings and to ensure their comfort and rule in the afterlife.\(^3^3\) He also discusses the many Egyptian deities, rituals, and festivals. This book is useful for studying the Abu Simbel, the temple displayed on the *All ’N All* album cover. It also gives understanding about the temple columns displayed on the *I Am* album cover. This book compliments another book by Wilkinson about ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses.

In *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, Wilkinson examines the evolution and worship of the many gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt. This book provides information about the deities used in Earth, Wind & Fires visual art, such as the official symbol of EWF, Heru, which is displayed on *The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. 1*. The deities of ancient Egypt had both human and elevated qualities, the latter often masked by peculiar animal appearances and seemingly bizarre role, yet they commanded sometimes surprising heights of religious development.\(^3^4\) The information


in this book also helps to dissect the video for “Fall in Love with Me” which features several Kemetic deities.

Ancient Egyptian symbols are also discussed in *Egyptian Symbols* (2008) by Heike Owusu. In this book, Owusu provides an understanding of who the ancient Egyptians were and what they believed. Symbolic ceremonies were important to the ancient Egyptians because they believed that, through ceremony, the gods and the spiritual world could be influenced. This book presents more than three hundred Egyptian symbols in words and illustrations. By studying these symbols, the student can understand how the ancient Egyptians viewed themselves and the world around them. The most common symbol associated with ancient Egypt is the pyramid. The pyramid is often displayed on much of Earth, Wind & Fire’s artwork. The most famous of all pyramids is the Great Pyramid at Giza.

The Great Pyramid is examined in “Astronomy and the Great Pyramid” (2004) by J. Donald Fernie. Fernie is Professor Emeritus of Astronomy at the University of Toronto. In this article, he gives the dimensions of this great structure and explains how it has fascinated people for thousands of years. The Great Pyramid is the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still standing. Fernie argues that astronomy may have been used during the planning and construction of the Great Pyramid. A major question about this pyramid is how did the builders manage to orient such a colossal structure to the cardinal points with such high accuracy? For example, the eastern side of

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the Great Pyramid points only three arcminutes away from a true north-south line.\textsuperscript{36} The Great Pyramid is discussed in another article.

“The Pyramid of Cheops” (1883) by Richard A. Proctor also discusses the mysticism behind the Great Pyramid. Proctor was an English astronomer who lived during the nineteenth century. In this article, he examines the dimensions of the pyramid and its structural features and offers theories of how it may have been constructed. Proctor also examines the religion of the ancient Egyptians to provide an understanding of why pyramids were built at the Giza plateau. Proctor suggests that the Great Pyramid was a temple before it became a tomb.\textsuperscript{37} The mysteries surrounding the pyramid have led some scholars to believe it represents some form of enlightenment.

Enlightenment may also be represented by the ancient Egyptian deity Heru. Heru is symbolized as a falcon. This god is often displayed in the visual art of Earth, Wind & Fire. The name of Heru/Horus is examined in “An Egyptian Etymology of the Name of Horus?” (1982) by Mordechai Gilula. Gilula was an Egyptologist, linguist, and long-time member of the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures of Tel Aviv University. In this article, Gilula traces the etymology of ‘Horus’ and the significance of the god’s name. In fact, there are several meanings for the god’s name. Horus is also discussed in another article.

\textsuperscript{36} J. Donald Fernie, “Astronomy and the Great Pyramid,” \textit{American Scientist} 92, no. 5 (September-October 2004): 408.

“Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.” (1959) by Rudolf Anthes examines Egyptian mythology and religion based on the Pyramid Texts. Anthes details the identity of Horus. According to Anthes, Horus was the highest god of Egypt. Horus was called “the lord of the sky” and “the one who presides over the sky.” Horus was the permanent ruler of the sky, who unlike the sun, did not vanish at night time. Horus is the official symbol of Earth, Wind & Fire. Another text which examines the spirituality of the ancient Egyptians is *Egyptian Cosmology: The Animated Universe*.

In *Egyptian Cosmology: The Animated Universe* (2001), Moustafa Gadalla surveys the applicability of Kemetic concepts to our modern understanding of the universe, creation, science, and philosophy. In this book, the reader can discover the Kemetic belief of creation, number mysticism, the universal energy matrix, how the social and political structures reflected the universe, and the interactions between the nine universal realms. Some of the concepts surveyed in this book may be secretly embedded in some of the lyrics of the songs recorded by Earth, Wind, & Fire. Another text which analyzes ancient Egyptian philosophy with hieroglyphic texts and symbols is *Egyptian Proverbs: Mystical Wisdom Teachings and Meditations*.

*Egyptian Proverbs: Mystical Wisdom Teachings and Meditations* (1997) by Dr. Muata Ashby is a collection of knowledge and wisdom which people can practice today and transform their lives. All proverbs are indexed for easy searches. Meditation is a major theme of this volume. Meditation was also an important practice by Earth, Wind

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& Fire. These proverbs instruct on how to live according to the Maat philosophy. Some of those proverbs are:

1. “There is only one SUPREME BEING, ALL is IT; IT manifests itself in infinite forms and many Gods.”
2. “Suffering in search of truth gives true meaning to the truth.”
3. Everything we do is sowing, and all of our experiences are harvests; this is the LAW OF SOWING AND HARVESTING.”


This book explains the purpose and functions of Maat. Karenga gives details about this ancient philosophy and spirituality. He solidifies the notion that Maat existed in all aspects of everyday life for the people of ancient Egypt. According to Karenga, the practice of Maat is conceived and carried out within the worldview which links the Divine, the natural, and the social. Maat is a way of righteousness defined by the practice of the Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. This gives an understanding of the consciousness Earth, Wind & Fire sang about and discusses themes which may be exemplified in the lyrics which may have been inspired by Maurice White’s affection for Egyptology. The concept of Maat and other ancient Egyptian concepts are also found in journal articles.

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“Maat and Order in African Cosmology: A Conceptual Tool for Understanding Indigenous Knowledge” (2008) by Denise Martin extends Maat beyond the boundaries of ancient Egyptian culture and develops it into an analytical tool for studying ancient Egyptian cosmology and African cosmology outside of Egypt. This article explains the ten patterns of Maat and how they are the foundation of the universe. Maat is also the focus of an article by Carole R. Fontaine.

In “A Modern Look at Ancient Wisdom: The Instruction of Ptahhotep Revisited” (1981), Fontaine explains how the central concept of ancient Egyptian wisdom literature lies in its understanding of the goddess Maat. This wisdom can be attributed to Ptahhotep, the vizier of King Izezi of the Fifth Dynasty of ancient Egypt. Fountain also compares Egyptian wisdom with the wisdom of the Hebrews. Egyptian culture is used as the standard. Fontaine explains that wisdom literature existed among the Egyptians long before they came in contact with the Hebrews. This article provides limericks of Ptahhotep and offers translations so the modern reader may obtain a clear understanding of ancient Egyptian wisdom.41

Rhetoric

To conduct this research, the theory of rhetoric must be applied. Therefore, it is necessary to review literature about rhetoric and marketing strategies, such as album covers and music videos. In layman terms, rhetoric is the art persuasion, especially with

the use of speech and literature. It can also refer to advertising and marketing. An important book for studying rhetoric as it pertains to black aesthetics is *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (*Foundations of the Philosophy of the Arts*) (2016).

In this book, Paul C. Taylor identifies and explores the most significant philosophical issues that have emerged from the aesthetic dimensions of black culture. Taylor discusses diverse fields from visual culture studies and art history to analytic philosophy to musicology. Surprisingly, Taylor fails to discuss album covers and other popular rhetorical strategies used by funk artists, such as space ships and elaborate costumes. The art of rhetoric is discussed in a descriptive article by Linda M. Scott.

In “Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric” (1994), Scott argues that conceptualizations of advertising images are incommensurate with what ads are really like, and that many images currently dismissed as affect laden or information devoid are complex figurative arguments. A new theoretical framework for the study of images is advanced in which advertising images are used as a form of rhetoric. A pluralistic program for studying advertising pictures as persuasion is outlined. The symbols associated with Earth, Wind, & Fire can be viewed as a form of rhetoric. EWF is known for their elaborate album covers and their use of Kemetic symbols. Scott suggests that visual elements must be capable of representing concepts, abstractions, actions, metaphors, and modifiers, such that they can be used in the invention of a
complex argument. This article helps to understand the purpose behind the use of the symbols associated with Earth, Wind, & Fire. Visual rhetoric is also discussed in Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Rhetoric (2008).

This book, edited by Lester C. Olson, Cara A. Finnegan, and Diane S. Hope, is an anthology containing 20 studies of visual rhetoric, exploring an array of visual communication forms, from photographs, prints, television documentary, and film to stamps, advertisements, and tattoos. The editors present critical perspectives that link visuality and rhetoric, locate the study of visual rhetoric within the disciplinary framework of communication, and explore the role of the visual in the cultural space of the United States. This book helps students understand the dynamics of public persuasion. This book is useful for studying the motive behind the visual aesthetics of Earth, Wind, & Fire. Aesthetics and rhetoric are also discussed by Claudia Gorbman.

In “Aesthetics and Rhetoric” (2004), Gorbman claims that aesthetics and rhetoric are two distinct constructs in which musical multimedia can be considered. Although these constructs are not opposites, they designate two kinds of discourses. Aesthetics is the study of what is beautiful and pleasing while rhetoric is the art of persuasion. In its apolitical sense, aesthetics sees the work as an object to be admired, as a gateway to the sublime, to be explored for the meaning it can reveal. The rhetoric of the work focuses on its manipulations of the audio-viewer, perhaps as a function of where the manipulative

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images come from and how they are embedded in the work. This information is useful for examining the album covers and music videos of Earth, Wind & Fire. The music video is also examined in a critical article.

In “Critically Contextualizing Music Video in Visual Culture and Art Education” (2007), Pamela G. Taylor examines and correlates theories of critical pedagogy, visual culture art education, and the music video. According to Taylor, music videos are used to create and sell artists while both inventing and disrupting the world they represent. Some videos are more aesthetic than others because they contain more visual images. The visual aspects of such videos are experienced for their own satisfaction. This can be applied to the Earth, Wind & Fire videos for “Let Me Talk” and “Fall in Love with Me.” Not only did EWF make interesting videos for marketing, but they also created elaborate album covers.

Album covers are discussed in a couple of journal articles. In “The Use of Space-Travel and Rocket-Ship imagery to Market Commercial Music: How Some Jazz Albums from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s Burned Brightly but Fizzled Fast” (2000), Morris B. Holbrook and Barbara Stern look at album covers and sleeves as objects that are to entertain and to create an atmosphere for the listener. The authors argue that the use of sci-fi imagery helps the listener depart from the actual day-to-day reality of both performers and audiences. This notion can be applied to Earth, Wind & Fire because the band used pyramids in their concerts as space ships. They also used pyramids on their

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album covers. The authors claim that some album covers with space ships involve ambiguities resulting from their associations with, religion, spirituality, astrology, or mysticism. In other words, the reference to space travel does not entail true sci-fi technology if it implies “traveling” by means of cosmic consciousness rather than via rocket-ship adventures.44 This notion can be assigned to EWF since Maurice White’s mission was to raise the consciousness of his listeners.

One more article about album covers is “Sound and Vision” by John L. Walters. Walters believes we should find new meaningful associations between music and design. He argues that popular music artists of the past century have always relied upon strong images and that the biggest stars’ appeal has always been visual as well as musical. Some of the most powerful music images of the rock era were perpetuated through club flyers, posters, magazines, film, videos, and album covers.45 The literature reviewed is useful. However, it exemplifies the need for more research on Earth, Wind & Fire. That is why this dissertation is significant.


CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

Music is one of the most profound aspects of African-American culture. From the beginning of their existence in America, black people have used music to cope with their pain, to challenge the social order, and to persuade people to take action to bring about change. During American slavery, slaves used their work songs to help them stay motivated while performing work and they used spirituals to send messages to other slaves about escaping the plantations. Those spirituals include “Wade in the Water,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “Steal Away to Jesus.” Music continued to play an important part in African-American culture after slavery.

When the Reconstruction era ended and Jim Crow was implemented, many African Americans found themselves in dire situations that were similar to slavery, such as sharecropping and convict leasing. Out of this, the blues was formed. When the Great Migration took place, many southern blacks who lived in rural areas moved to the cities of the South and the North. The Great Migration began around 1915 and ended in 1970. Jazz music developed during the early years of the migration: the 1920s. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1950s, many jazz artists gave hundreds of performances to raise funds for the civil rights cause.
In 1959, the Chicago Urban League staged a major jazz festival in collaboration with *Playboy* magazine which featured Miles Davis, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Dakota Staton, and Kai Winding. In February 1963, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, Charles Mingus, and Thelonius Monk joined Nina Simone in sponsoring SNCC’s “Salute to Southern Students” concert at Carnegie Hall. In the fall of that year, CORE staged the “Jazz Salute for Freedom” concert which gave rise to its loosely related, highly lucrative double-album. In February 1964, Miles Davis played a benefit for SNCC at the Lincoln Center. The funds from this benefit supported voter registration work in Mississippi. In 1965, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln took the *Freedom Now Suite* to the stage and raised about $900 for the Boston Friends of SNCC. In mid-decade, Amiri Baraka invented the jazz mobile, a black educational and jazz initiative which toured the Harlem streets, teaching black history and preaching black cultural pride and unity.\(^1\) It was also in the 1960s when funk music developed. This occurred during the American Civil Rights Movement and Black Arts Movement.

According to Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), the black music of the late 1950s and 1960s placed itself outside any mainstream consideration. This music signifies more “radical changes” and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes of African Americans towards the general environment. Black music has always been radical in the context of formal American culture.\(^2\) But the funk music that was formed during the


1960s is considered some of the most radical. Funk music challenged the Western notion that sacred or spiritual music should not exist in a secular space. Teresa Reed, music professor at the University of Tulsa, explains that in the West African worldview, music is intrinsically spiritual, the sacred is intrinsically musical, and both music and the divine emanated throughout every aspect of life. Samuel Floyd, the prolific scholar and founding director of the Center for Black Music Research, claimed that this notion is shared by scholars. He stated,

Scholars seem to agree that the aim of African music has always been to translate the experiences of life and of the spiritual world into sound, enhancing and celebrating life through cradle songs, songs of reflection, historical songs, fertility songs, songs about death and mourning, and other song varieties.

Ricky Vincent, historian of African-American music, writes about the spirituality in funk music. Vincent claims that the Funk brought to life the musical soul of black America in the 1970s by keeping it connected to the past, present, and future. Perhaps the most important retention from Africa has been the spiritual element of music-making, the necessity to bring about trance and to raise rhythm to a cosmic level. African music, gospel music, and jazz were all designed to do this, and funk music continued the tradition. That spiritual tradition is found in Earth, Wind & Fire’s art. The band expressed spiritual messages in their songs and they exemplified ancient Egyptian spiritual themes by displaying ancient Egyptian deities in their visual art.

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3 Reed, 5.
4 Ibid.
5 Vincent, 36-37.
Many African Americans became disillusioned with what many considered to be the hypocrisy of Westernized Christianity and have long considered alternative religions in their quest for spiritual fulfillment. Particularly in the 1960s, young African Americans considered other religions that would address issues of racial identity and equality. Many African Americans converted to Islam, especially black men. The conversion of prominent black athletes Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (formerly Lew Alcindor), as well as the active ministry of Muslims to the black population in prisons, contributed to the visibility of Islam among younger black men. African Americans also adopted religions that derived from West and Central Africa.

The traditional spirits of Africa were introduced to African Americans by immigrants from Cuba and Haiti. The religions of Santeria and Vodou, which originated during slavery in Cuba and Haiti and practiced by slaves in European colonies in Africa, spread in black communities and across America. In America, as well as in Cuba and Haiti, the members celebrated the feasts of the spirits in rituals of drumming, singing, and dancing that derived ultimately from West and Central Africa. These rituals expressed the belief that spirits ruled over all aspects of life. Although most African Americans remained Christians, many of them chose not to confine themselves to church spaces.

As the traditional pulpit of the black church spawned its share of secular entertainers, such as Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and Patti LaBelle, other

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preaching voices emerged in secular music that represented a departure from tradition. Teresa Reed declares that this departure from tradition in the 1970s became most salient in funk music.\(^7\) The departure is seen most notably in the art of Parliament-Funkadelic and Earth, Wind & Fire. According to Philip Bailey, lead singer of Earth, Wind, & Fire, the premier mission of the band has been to raise people to a higher level of consciousness. Maurice White, founder of Earth, Wind, & Fire, called his mission ‘the concept.’\(^8\) With this concept, EWF aimed to signify universal love and spiritual enlightenment. These ideas can be found in the band’s lyrics and visual aesthetics.

Rickey Vincent describes the 1970s as the decade of integration – and the dissipation of a coherent black consciousness. Important black cultural upheavals, like the demise of radicalism under the destructive COINTEL-PRO program of the FBI, occurred outside of the nightly news. The crushing of the movement left a void that was substituted by the appeals of pop culture. Blaxploitation films which catered to primarily black audiences, such as *Coffy* and *Car Wash* were produced. White-produced television shows like *Sanford and Son* and *The Jeffersons* were also created.\(^9\) It was also during the 1970s when racial pride among African Americans increased. More blacks in America were wearing dashikis and afros. They also wore platform shoes to symbolize the notion of “walking tall.” The television show *Soul Train* first aired in 1970. It featured black

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\(^7\) Reed, 137.

\(^8\) Bailey, 1.

musicians in the genres of soul, funk, gospel, and Hip Hop. Funk musicians themselves had been very serious about maintaining an ideology and consciousness in their music throughout the 1970s.\textsuperscript{10}

To exemplify their ideology, Earth, Wind, and Fire often used ancient Egyptian symbols on their album covers and sleeves. Ideas that relate to ancient Egypt can be found in the lyrics of some of their most popular songs. Why did Earth, Wind, & Fire draw inspiration from Kemet (ancient Egypt)? This question may be answered by applying the theory of rhetoric.

**Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. According to Linda Scott, Professor Emerita in the College of Media at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, rhetoric is an interpretive theory that frames a message as an artist’s attempt to influence an audience. The artist’s intention is understood to be manifest in the argument, the evidence, the order of argumentation, and the style of delivery. The formal elements are selected according to the sender’s expectations about how the audience will approach the genre, the speaker, and the topic. Therefore, the artist crafts the message in anticipation of the listener or viewer’s response, using shared knowledge of various vocabularies and conventions, as well as common experiences. Receivers of the message use this same body of knowledge to decipher the message, infer the artist’s intention, evaluate the argument, and formulate a response. Cultural knowledge thus provides the basis for normative interaction and

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 39.
persuasion. In other words, rhetoric can be defined as the use of all available means to persuade an audience.

Maurice White wanted to persuade his black audience to take pride in their heritage. White declared, “Our rich culture did not start on slave ships, or in cotton fields, and it didn’t start in housing projects. It started in Egypt.” White wanted African Americans to know where they came from and have confidence and pride. That is the main reason he turned to Egyptology. He wanted black people to have self-respect and claim Egypt for themselves.

Since the 1700s, many European scholars have figuratively tried to take Egypt out of Africa. Some of them were convinced that African people were not capable of creating such an advanced civilization. The people of Egypt created some of the greatest monuments the world has ever seen, such as the Great Sphinx, Hatshepsut’s Temple, The Valley of the Kings, and of course, the Great Pyramid. The Great Pyramid is so astounding that some scholars have suggested that it must have been built by extraterrestrials. The Great Pyramid is truly a wonder to the human eyes. Ancient Egypt was so great that a science was created about it: Egyptology. This science has led to the plundering of Egyptian artifacts. There are more Egyptian artifacts in museums around the world than artifacts from any other civilization.


Egyptian artifacts can be seen in various places of the Western world. The British Museum in London has a collection of Egyptian artifacts that is only second in size to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has over 26,000 Egyptian artifacts. The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada has an Egyptian collection of more than 25,000 artifacts. The Louvre Museum in Paris, France has an Egyptian collection that covers all periods from approximately 4,000 BC. The Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago displays over 800 Egyptian artifacts dating from 5,000 BC to 700 AD. These are just a few of the several museums which house artifacts from the great ancient civilization of ancient Egypt. Ancient Egypt has been the fascination of academia, popular culture, and Hollywood.\textsuperscript{13}

All major motion pictures about ancient Egypt that were produced in Hollywood portray the ancient Egyptians as people of European descent. For example, Yul Brynner portrayed Pharaoh Ramses II in \textit{The Ten Commandments} and Elizabeth Taylor portrayed Cleopatra VII in \textit{Cleopatra}. This depiction of ancient Egyptians as white people has helped fuel the notion that people of African descent are not capable of creating a great civilization. To debunk myths about ancient Egypt, black people must create their own narratives about Egypt and use their own images. Maurice White not only used Kemetic images for black people, but he also wanted to inspire people of all races. Maurice White exclaimed “Today, we have scientific proof that all of mankind has African origins. We

are all brothers. Everybody is connected.” 14 Ancient black history is not only for black people, it is for all people. In other words, black history is human history. The evidence of which Maurice White spoke is the discovery of the fossilized fragments of a humanoid in a geological bed which is dated to about 25 million years ago. Basil Davidson, historian of Africa, declared that the fragments were discovered by Mary Leakey, a paleontologist, on an island in East Africa’s Lake Victoria. Leakey also discovered another skeleton of a humanoid in northern Tanzania who lived about 2 million years ago. 15 The oldest humanoid bones were found in Africa. Therefore, all humanity has an African origin. We are all related and have a connection to Africa. White has implied this by using Kemetic images in the Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art.

Linda Scott believes if we are to construe images as a form of rhetoric, then visuals must have certain capabilities and characteristics. First, visual elements, or symbols, must be capable of representing concepts, abstractions, actions, and metaphors, so that they can be used in the invention of a complex argument. There must also be an ability to guide the order of argumentation via the arrangement of the visual elements. 16

Earth, Wind, & Fire used several visual elements in their art. They hired costume designer Bill Whitten to create their elaborately designed African outfits. Doug Henning, the famous magician, provided stage effects for their concerts. Japanese artist, Shusie

14 White, 148.


16 Scott, 253.
Nagoaka, was employed to design the album covers and George Faison choreographed the shows. All these visual effects became synonymous with EWF during the 1970s and early 1980s. The band is known for having some of the most elaborate covers for their albums. These albums include *Spirit* (1976), *All n All* (1977), *The Best of Earth, Wind, & Fire* (1978), *I Am* (1979), *Faces* (1980), *Raise* (1981), and *Electric Universe* (1983). All these album covers display intriguing Kemetic symbols.

As stated previously, the primary mission of Earth, Wind, & Fire was to raise people to a higher level of consciousness. This attempt to elevate the minds of their listeners can be heard in the lyrics of their most popular songs. Love appears to be one of the major themes of the band. This includes self-love, romantic love, agape love, and love for one’s fellow man. A popular song about universal love is titled “All About Love.” Some of the lyrics are as follows:

Let the light shine, all through your mind  
Feel your little heart, aglow  
Take the time, make up your mind  
It’s all about love

This verse seems to suggest that love is ubiquitous and to navigate through this world, one must have love, whether it is romantic, platonic, or agape. This verse also seems to persuade the listener to love, no matter what type of situation he is facing.

In today’s world, some people would agree that music has the power to influence people. According to Larry Dunn, EWF’s former innovative keyboardist and musical director, several fans approached them to express their gratitude. One man exclaimed,

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“Because of you, I got off heroin.”18 EWF’s music has helped listeners get through some troubled times in their lives. EWF concerts have some of the most diverse audiences for pop music artists. Although EWF’s music is primarily rooted in African-American soul music, their concerts consist of people from various races, religious groups, and social backgrounds.

Earth, Wind, & Fire’s art has influenced millions of people around the world. They have sold over 90 million records. They have sold out concert venues all over the world. And they are still being honored with awards today. The theory of rhetoric is one that is suitable for conducting research on one the most influential pop music bands of all time: Earth, Wind, & Fire. Hopefully, this theoretical framework will help to answer the questions posed for this research.

Research Methods

To conduct this research, ethnomusicology was employed. The author studied the artistry of Earth, Wind, & Fire from a historical, social and cultural standpoint. To carry out this research, the delimitations for this research and the analysis of the data were restricted to Kemetic symbols in the visual art and Kemetic themes found in the lyrics of fourteen songs recorded during the band’s classic period. EWF’s classic period was from 1973 until 1983. This is when the band achieved their greatest success. It was during this period that they sold the most albums, sold the most concert tickets, and had the most hit records.

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18 Ibid., 70.
To examine the Kemetic themes in the visual art, the author sought Kemetic symbols based on his moderate understanding of ancient Egyptian art. The author had a basic understanding of Kemetic themes before he attended college. His knowledge about ancient Egypt expanded after receiving a bachelor’s degree in African-American Studies. He also received a master’s degree in African-American Studies. The author examined the cover art for seven albums produced from 1976 to 1983. The seven album covers display Kemetic symbols, such as pyramids, temples, and deities:

- *Spirit* (1976) – pyramids
- *All 'N All* (1976) – pyramids, Abu Simbel, ankh, eye of Heru
- *I Am* (1979) – temple columns, pyramid
- *Faces* (1980) – pyramid

Some of the Kemetic symbols were also displayed in music videos. Three music videos were also examined for this dissertation. *Serpentine Fire* was a simple video, but *Let Me Talk* and *Fall in Love with Me* are more complex. *Serpentine Fire* features two major Kemetic symbols, and *Let Me Talk* and *Fall in Love with Me* feature various Kemetic symbols. These videos also display various types of Kemetic symbols:

- *Serpentine Fire* (1977) – Abu Simbel, pyramid
- *Fall in Love with Me* (1983) – Great Pyramid, statues, columns, Heru, Anubis, Great Sphinx, sarcophagus, Auset, Nebthet, criosphinx/Amun
The author watched these videos several times on Youtube. He was able to rewind, pause, and fast-forward the videos if necessary. This afforded him the luxury of gaining full details of each video and every symbol displayed within them.

To provide an understanding of the Kemetic symbols and imagery, the author studied literature about Kemetic culture. He focused on symbols, monuments, and deities to decipher their original significations and juxtaposed them with EWF’s intent for using this strategy in modern popular culture. The author also focused on Kemetic spirituality and cosmology. The pyramid was the most prominent symbol used by EWF during the classic period. The pyramid was not only used for cover art, but the band used small pyramids as marketing products. Pyramids were also used in the band’s live performances. Today, the band continues to display pyramids by projecting them on a large screen behind the stage. The band’s use of pyramids for performance tactics are examined for this dissertation.

To obtain clarity about EWFs use of Kemetic symbols, the author conducted interviews with musicians who were once members of the band or who worked closely with the band. The process for obtaining the interviews took several months. The author had to get permission from Clark Atlanta University’s Internal Review Board. This board is designed to make sure there are no risks involved when dealing with human subjects while performing research. To prepare for dealing with human subjects, the author had to complete online training and pass tests on different subjects. The author developed questions that were reviewed by the board for approval. The author also
designed a consent form to be signed by each interviewee. The consent form was also reviewed for approval by the board. Once the author received approval, he began searching for musicians to interview.

The quest to contact musicians took several months. The author contacted Earth, Wind & Fire’s management company to reach the band members. That was not successful. The author has an Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity brother, Jerry Freeman, who played the trumpet for Earth, Wind & Fire from 1996-1997. Freeman gave the author a list of names of musicians he should contact via Facebook, which has become valuable for this research. The author sent messages to those musicians and received responses. When those musicians responded, the author informed them about his research. The musicians were excited about the research topic and were more than willing to provide interviews. The most crucial response came from Morris Pleasure.

Morris Pleasure responded to the author two months after the author’s message was sent. The response occurred on Tuesday, March 14, 2015. Pleasure agreed to be interviewed and he informed the author about a concert that would take place in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on March 15, 2015. The author began to make plans to attend the concert. Pleasure contacted EWF drummer, John Paris, and informed him about the author’s research. Paris is originally from Trenton, New Jersey, and he found the author’s name, Trenton, to be quite interesting. Paris reserved two tickets and two backstage passes for the author.
The author drove from the south side of Metro Atlanta, Georgia, to Nashville, Tennessee, with his Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity brother, Dr. Henry Carter. Carter received his Ph.D. degree two months before the concert and offered moral support to the author. The drive was about two hours long. The gentlemen attended the concert and enjoyed every minute of it. The Kemetic symbol Heru was displayed on the stage. While the band performed different songs, different Kemetic images were displayed on the large screen behind the stage. There were also images of the late great Maurice White, the band’s founder. The images affirmed the author’s desire to complete this dissertation. After the concert, the author went backstage to meet the band members. One musician was Morris James O’Connor, whom the author had met through Facebook and previously interviewed. O’Connor was excited to see the author and anxious to tell the other band members about the author’s research. The author received contact information for EWF’s road manager, Tony Clark. He also received contact information for Verdine White and Ralph Johnson, two musicians who have been with the band since its classic period.

The author conducted interviews with Verdine White and Ralph Johnson the next day, March 16, 2017. Both musicians provided critical information because they were close to Maurice White and experienced the classic period. Other musicians were also interviewed. Sheldon Reynolds, a close friend of Maurice White and guitarist who began working with the band in 1987, gave an interview. Wayne Vaughn, songwriter and composer, gave an interview. Vaughn was a friend of Maurice White for about 38 years.
He worked with EWF on songs that were recorded in the 1980s. Another interview was given by Morris James O’Connor, a guitarist who has been with the band since 2008. The last musician interviewed is Morris Pleasure, a keyboardist who worked with EWF from 1993 until 2001. These musicians helped to give clarity about Maurice White’s philosophy for the band.

For the interviews, the author asked each musician to provide a brief bio of himself, including his musical training and how he became a member of Earth, Wind & Fire, or how he began working with the band. Each musician was asked about the symbols in the visual art and the themes in the lyrics. The author also asked each musician how Maurice White’s affection for Egyptology may have affected him as a musician working with this particular band. The musicians provided different information on different topics. All the interviews together helped the author move further along in his research.

As of March 2017, eight of the nine band members from the classic period are still alive. Maurice White, the founder of Earth, Wind & Fire, died in February 2016. An interview with him would have been most important. However, his autobiography was published in September 2016. His book provided crucial information for this dissertation: White’s purpose for incorporating ancient Egyptian themes. Most of the fifteen songs examined were written by Maurice White and he often incorporated Kemetic themes into the lyrics. Philip Bailey, lead singer of EWF, also wrote an autobiography that was published in 2014. Bailey’s autobiography was also helpful for
this research but White’s autobiography provided the author with more crucial information, primarily for examining lyrics. The fifteen songs were selected by the author based on criteria from Kemetic ideology. Many of the songs were chosen because they deal with metaphysics or refer to customs related to ancient Egypt.

All fifteen songs are well-known songs by Earth, Wind & Fire. Many of them became smash hit records during the 1970s. The songs examined relate to Kemetic ideology, including Maat. Maat is a concept based on ethics, faith, and morality. According to Maulana Karenga, in its essential meaning, Maat is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: the Divine, the natural and the social. In its expansive sense, Maat is an interrelated order of rightness, requiring right relations with right behavior towards the Divine, nature, and other humans. As moral thought and practice, Maat is a way of rightness defined by the practice of the Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth, justice propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. Lastly, as a foundation and framework for the moral ideal and its practice, Maat is the constantly achieved condition of requirements for the ideal world, society, and person.¹⁹ Some of the tenets of Maat deal with

- Hope and confidence
- The power of the spoken word
- The inner man (heart)
- Man’s soul
- Spiritual sight (third eye)
- Meditation/escape
- The afterlife
- Deity adoration

Other Kemetic themes found consist of Kemetic cultural practices. A song may even make a simple suggestion about ancient Egypt. The author studied basic tenets of Kemetic spirituality and ideology by reviewing literature from scholars on ancient Egyptian civilization.

The fifteen songs examined hold inspirational messages for which Earth, Wind & Fire are known. Those songs are listed below.

- “Keep Your Head to the Sky” (1973)
- “Mighty Mighty” (1974)
- “Open Our Eyes” (1974)
- “Shining Star” (1975)
- “All About Love” (1975)
- “That's the Way of the World” (1975)
- “Sing a Song” (1975)
- “Getaway” (1976)
- “Earth, Wind & Fire” (1976)
- “Spirit” (1976)
- “Serpentine Fire” (1977)
- “Fantasy” (1977)
- “Jupiter” (1977)
- “In the Stone” (1979)
- “Lady Sun” (1981)

*The year in parentheses indicates date of recording, not release date*

The author listened to the aforementioned songs and other EWF songs continuously. Instead of listening to the songs via compact discs, the author used the internet for listening. At home, the author listened to the songs via internet radio, especially Spotify. He created a playlist of EWF hit records and listened to them repeatedly. The author also listened to recordings while exercising at the gym. He used the internet sites Spotify, Pandora, and Youtube. The author also listened to EWF songs while traveling in his automobile. He has most of the songs from EWF’s classic period downloaded to his
iPod. Listening to EWF makes the drive to and from work every day more pleasant and helps time go by faster. The author also listened to EWF songs while writing this dissertation. This served as motivation to complete this research project.

To know the exact lyrics, the author listened to a song closely several times. To verify the lyrics, the author used internet sites which post song lyrics, such as Genius.com, Lyrics.com, and Songlyrics.com. The author also consulted Songfacts.com to see what others may have written about specific songs. The author also used the internet to understand how Earth, Wind & Fire listeners responded to the lyrics and the Kemetic imagery in the visual art.

As stated previously, Facebook has been extremely valuable for this research. The author belongs to a Facebook group titled The Official Earth, Wind & Fire Legacy Page. This group consists of more than four thousand EWF fans. The author posted a question asking whether listeners were inspired by just the band’s dynamic and whether the visual art and lyrics had an impact. The author also asked whether listeners credit EWF with raising their consciousness concerning Egyptology. Several people responded. Those responses helped the author understand how listeners responded to the complex art of EWF.

**Research Questions**

1. Earth, Wind & Fire was created during the American Black Arts Movement. Maurice White, the creator of the band, developed a profound affection for Egyptology. What do the ancient Egyptian symbols in the band’s visual art signify in modern popular culture?
2. Music scholars, such as Rickey Vincent and Teresa Reed, have classified Earth, Wind & Fire as a funk band. Funk music was created as a means of protest for African Americans and a rejection of traditional Western ideals. What are the Kemetic themes found in some of the songs of Earth, Wind & Fire which may have been used to reject traditional Western ideals?

In the 1970s, Earth, Wind & Fire established themselves as one of the most popular and intriguing bands in popular music. Their elaborate album covers, spectacular concerts, and polished lyrics helped them reach legendary status and to become one of the most mystical act in popular culture. Even though EWF has positive lyrics with uplifting messages, the band has been accused of devil worship and incorporating subliminal messages into their songs. This is based on their use of Kemetic symbols. Many people in a Judeo-Christian society have accepted the notion that anything associated with ancient Egyptian spirituality is evil and has nothing to do with the Creator monotheistic God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This dissertation provides evidence from primary sources and secondary sources which prove those assumptions are far from the truth. Information is provided about the band’s purpose for employing Kemetic imagery and lyrics which pertain to Kemetic ideals.
CHAPTER IV

VISUAL STATE OF MIND: EXAMINING THE KEMETIC THEMES IN THE VISUAL ART OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE

Throughout the middle to late 1970s and early 1980s, Earth, Wind & Fire was celebrated for the ancient Egyptian symbols found on their album covers and advertising products. Those symbols were also seen in their concerts. The band members often wore ancient Egyptian-inspired costumes when they performed. This affection for ancient Egypt and Africa, in general, took place during the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement, which began in 1965 and 1966, respectively. These two movements were birthed out of the African-American Civil Rights Movement. EWF was formed in 1969, at the heights of those two movements. This was one year after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which is considered the nadir of the African-American Civil Rights Movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. This tragedy inspired the emergence of a powerful, nationwide movement to recast and proclaim the distinctiveness of racial identities as homage to the Civil Rights Movement and to Dr. King himself. To be proud and black after April 4, 1968, was not an act of militancy for African Americans. Instead, it was an assertion of unique heritage that influential entertainers promoted with profound success. While grieving the loss of Dr. King, an elevated sense of black pride saturated mainstream cultural spaces and altered enterprise
from music to fashion. Earth, Wind & Fire found success with this new racial pride by incorporating ancient Egyptian themes into their visual art.¹

Earth, Wind & Fire was among the first musicians to use ancient Egyptian themes in their art. They were among the first pop culture superstars to embrace their African heritage proudly. From their use of African instruments to their on-stage wardrobes and dashikis to their ancient Egyptian-themed album covers, they drew connections between African Americans and their ancestors and brethren around the world. Maurice White acknowledged that the musical evolution of EWF follows a logical, linear path – jazz to R&B to funk to techno grooves – held together by African and Latin rhythms; “It all comes back to Africa, man. That’s where it all starts.”²

Because of their passion for African culture, Earth, Wind & Fire has been called one of the first Afrocentric groups in pop music history. Richard Harrington, staff writer for The Washington Post, wrote, “The Afrocentric cosmology that would fuel the band’s success began to take shape in the 70s.”³ Jason Elias, pop culture historian and music journalist, wrote, “They balanced a unique message of Afrocentricity and universal concerns with an assiduous, scholarly application of many musical styles.”⁴


interview with Maurice White and Philip Bailey for *Rolling Stone*, Dan Epstein declared, “Earth, Wind and Fire have always had an Afrocentric vibe.”

The term “Afrocentric” refers to things related to Afrocentricity (formerly called Afrocentrism), which became popular during the black social movements of the 1960s, although it has been around since the 1800s. According to Dr. Molefi Asante, Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the focal point of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. Also, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Therefore, to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, including racism, homophobia, patriarchy, classism, white supremacy, etc. Maurice White, the founder of EWF, once spoke about his disdain for the oppression in the world. White stated that there are so many things wrong on this planet: starvation, poverty, negative thoughts, racism, a lot of weirdness. He believed that someone has to communicate something to try to balance out the wrong things, if it is possible. White explained, “What happens is that when those higher thoughts are communicated to a thousand, that thousand can become ten thousand. The message might not get to everybody, but we can lighten the load a little bit and lift the planet.”

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Maurice White’s own path led him to visit such places as Stonehenge and the ruins of ancient Indian civilizations, searching for answers to what he described as the mysteries of the universe. He proclaimed, “I’m a searcher. I’m curious. I’m a child of the universe, and I will forever be a child of the universe until I leave this planet. If you’re alive inside, you have to have some curiosity about the universe. Questions, that’s where I’m at. I’ve always been interested in mysterious things. Stonehenge, the Mayans, the Incas, the Pyramids and the Sphinx.”

White’s interest in the Pyramids and the Sphinx led him to study Egyptology for several years. During that time, a number of ancient mystical symbols began to be displayed on Earth, Wind & Fire album covers. White explained, “Most of the things that I have studied, relative to metaphysics and all that, I try to relate (to the public) through my album covers and music. Actually, the main reason I do it is to stimulate curiosity.” White also stated, “Like the Egyptians was part of the old and the new, and so we just took that as a symbol (pyramid) and utilized some characters from Egyptian background and it worked.” Ralph Johnson declared, “It was part of our learning process. It was part of the things he (Maurice White) wanted to investigate and we, along with him, were investigating it together.”

There were more reasons for using Kemetic symbols.

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8 Lynn Van Matre.


Maurice White explained, “I wanted Earth, Wind & Fire to use the symbols of Egypt in our presentation, to remind black folks of our rich and glorious heritage. And not just African Americans: today we have scientific proof that all of mankind has African origins.” White adds, “We are all brothers. Everybody is connected. On some basic, primal level we all are a reflection of the universe, and in that reflection we are connected to one divine source, God.”

It has been questioned why Maurice White did not use themes from West Africa, since most African Americans can trace their lineage to that region. Asa Hilliard, the late professor and Egyptologist, discussed the importance of Kemet (ancient Egypt).

According to Hilliard, Kemet may seem remote to many African Americans, in time, in physical location, and in relationship to meaningful priorities in the United States. Yet, there is a crucial need for African Americans to rescue and reconstruct this and other parts of all African heritage. Kemet was an integral part of a culturally unified continent. Because of Kemet’s abundant records, it is the best window on the dynamics of African culture generally. Kemet is one of the oldest civilizations in the world and it is the most studied. Therefore, it is one of the most recognized. Africa is not only home to Kemet and other great civilizations. It is the origin of the human species.

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Charles S. Finch III wrote that over a period of four million years, modern man evolved in Africa. The weight of the fossil evidence and DNA studies proclaim this. Therefore, all human races are branches off a trunk whose roots lie in Africa. The races are merely variations within the human species, but there is only one mother and nurse of humanity: Africa. The scientific proof was first discovered by paleontologist Mary Leakey. Her husband, Louis Leakey, was also a paleontologist.¹³

Pan-Africanist historian John G. Jackson wrote that in 1959, Mary Leakey made her first big discovery at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. She discovered a hominid (human-like) skeleton of specimen who used tools and who may have had the power of speech. He lived about 20 million years ago. The next great discovery occurred in 1960 at Olduvai Gorge. Leakey found the skeleton of a specimen she dubbed “Homo habilis” (man with ability). This specimen possessed hands with opposable thumbs and capable of making tools. Mary Leakey regarded him as a direct ancestor of Homo sapiens (modern humans). He flourished between one and two million years ago.¹⁴ This information is something Maurice White believed all people should know, especially black people. This scientific evidence proves that humans are related and have a common origin: Africa. This connection is something White wanted to display in some of the album covers.

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The elaborate album covers are used as an advertising strategy. Linda Scott argues if advertising images are to be interpreted as a form of rhetoric, then visuals must have certain capabilities and characteristics. First, visual images must be capable of representing concepts, abstractions, actions, metaphors, and modifiers, such that they can be used in the creation of a complex argument. Visual elements must have the ability to guide the order of argumentation via their arrangement. Visual elements must also carry meaningful variation in their manner of delivery, such that the selection of style can suggest an intended variation.

Visual elements are a symbolic system of the ordinary variety. The term ‘symbol’ refers to letters, words, texts, pictures, diagrams, maps, models, etc., but carries no implication of the oblique or the occult. Earth, Wind & Fire primarily used pictures, images, and signs as symbols. In addition to ancient Egyptian symbols, Earth, Wind & Fire also displayed a few symbols from different world religions, such as the Buddha, the Jewish hexagram, and the Christian cross. However, this research only examines those symbols created in ancient Egypt. Symbols in ancient Egypt were used to convey messages and suggest ideas. To be able to understand the world view of the ancient Egyptians, one must view it from a magical and spiritual angle.

The thinking of the ancient Egyptians was not logical and rational, but image-symbolic, as described by Heike Owusu. The magical principle implied that all powerful and great things are portrayed in small, apparently invisible things – both above and

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below, macrocosmos and microcosmos. For example, the scarab, which has been displayed in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art, was a symbol of the rising sun. Because large things are portrayed in small things, one could influence the important processes in the world of the gods and the other world through symbolic ceremonies and portrayals. An inherent power, a kind of being or soul, is attributed to the symbols of ancient Egypt.¹⁶ That power is also believed to exist in the earliest form of Egyptian writing called hieroglyphics, which means picture symbols. Hieroglyph is a Greek term. The inhabitants of ancient Egypt called their writing Medu Netcher, which means words of nature or language of the gods.

Alan Gardiner, the prominent English Egyptologist, described hieroglyphic writing as an offshoot of pictorial art, an early an important function of which was to provide a visible record of facts and events, accessible to those who were beyond the range of the spoken word.¹⁷ The ancient Egyptians used symbols, such as animals, monuments, and objects to convey ideas and messages, just as Maurice White did for his audience. Writing is simply the physical representation of language. Language is the basis of culture and the primary mode of communication. To have sufficient knowledge about a culture, one must understand its language. There is no evidence which suggests Maurice White ever studied Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. White had a passion for ancient Egypt, but it is safe to say that he was not a scholar or expert on ancient Egypt.


Spirit

Ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) symbols began to show up in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art in 1976 when they released the *Spirit* album. *Spirit* was produced by Maurice White and Charles Stepney. Stepney was a former Chess Records arranger, producer, instrumentalist, songwriter, and White’s main collaborator on his Earth, Wind & Fire projects. Before the *Spirit* album was completed, he died on May 17, 1976, in Chicago, Illinois, at the age of 45.\(^\text{18}\) This album includes the hit singles “Getaway,” “On Your Face,” and “Saturday Nite.” The *Spirit* cover was designed by art designer and director Tom Steele. The cover shows all nine members of the band standing in front of three white pyramids. The band members are striking unique poses as if they are meditating. The three pyramids are reminiscent of the three large pyramids at the Giza plateau in Egypt.

Today, the pyramids at Giza are not white or any other bright color, but they are light brown. But for the first 3,000 years of their history, they were encased in brilliant polished limestone. J. Donald Fernie described the Great Pyramid in *American Scientist*. Fernie declares that the slabs were up to 2.5 meters thick and were fitted together with joints so fine they could scarcely be seen, according to Herodotus, who visited Egypt in 440 B.C. This must have been an amazing sight in the Egyptian sun! The sun’s rays would reflect from the pyramid and it could shine bright from a far distance. Unfortunately, the limestone covering was stripped in medieval times to build palaces

and mosques in Cairo. Now, only the rough building blocks of the pyramids can be seen. The pyramids on the album cover are white. That is how the pyramids looked more than 4,000 years. It is a testimony of the greatness of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

When asked about the significance of the pyramids on the *Spirit* cover, Maurice White responded, “Dedicated to Charles Stepney sending him on his way.” It has become common knowledge that the pyramids were gateways to the afterlife for ancient Egyptian rulers. In *The North American Review*, Richard Proctor described the pyramids as royal tombs. He claimed that the pyramids were mausoleums – chief tombs within whole cemeteries of tombs – proving that they were associated with the religious belief of the Egyptians. The religious belief of the Egyptians assures us that it included full faith, of a very material sort, in an afterlife. It was their faith in a resurrection of the body which led them to provide with such extreme care for the protection of the body.

Zahi Hawass, Egyptian archaeologist and Egyptologist, explained that the most essential item for a burial was the mummification of the deceased body. Elaborate sets of nested sarcophagi were also crucial elite and royal burials. Also made specifically for the buried were sets of funerary figurines known as shabtis. Shabtis were meant to perform

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menial tasks for the deceased in the afterlife. Also, essential for the afterlife were items used in the physical life and needed for eternal survival and pleasure. Food and drink could be in the form of offerings made in the tomb chapel or mortuary temple, or could be mummified meat, spices, jars of wine, and other foodstuffs. Clothing, weapons, furniture and other objects used by the living were also important for the burial.\textsuperscript{22}

Apparently, Maurice White believed Charles Stepney was deserving of the same honor as the leaders of ancient Egypt. This dedication to Stepney provides insight into White’s knowledge of ancient Egypt. Not only were pyramids displayed on the \textit{Spirit} cover, but small pyramids were used as promotional items for the album. These pyramids were about 12 inches in height and width and bore the design of the \textit{Spirit} album. These small pyramids were also used for the \textit{All ’N All} album which was released a year later, in 1977.

\textit{All ’N All}

For the \textit{All ’N All} tour, Earth, Wind & Fire intensified their concerts. They used magic tricks and pyramids as stage props. The band members would climb inside the pyramids, and then, the pyramids would explode and shatter, only to reveal the musicians safe and sound, standing among the audience.\textsuperscript{23} To perform the magic tricks, Maurice White recruited the famous magician, Doug Henning.

\textsuperscript{22} Zahi Hawass, \textit{Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs} (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2005), 121-124.

\textsuperscript{23} Bailey, 171.
Doug Henning was known all over the world for his magic tricks performed on Television and Broadway and in Las Vegas. Henning was born on May 3, 1947, in Fort Garry, Manitoba, Canada. By age 14, he was performing at parties and had developed his own levitation act, using his sister. After graduating with a degree in psychology from McMaster College in Hamilton, Ontario, he won a grant from the Canadian government to study magic by convincing government officials that it could be considered an art form. Using the $4,000 in grant money and raising thousands more, Henning developed a successful stage show, Spellbound, which occurred in Toronto.

In May 1974, Doug Henning took his magic to Broadway with The Magic Show and it ran for four and a half years. During this time, he also performed at casinos in Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe. His success continued into the mid-1980s until he retired. Then, he sold some of his most famous illusions to another famous magician, David Copperfield, who started working with Earth, Wind & Fire in 1979. Henning died in 2000 at the age of 52 after a short battle with liver cancer. He is credited with single-handedly reviving the public’s interest in magic after a long slump.24

Doug Henning created fantastic illusions for Earth, Wind & Fire. One illusion consisted of hooded aliens with masks gradually joining the members of the band. Then, one by one, the band members entered a metallic pyramid, leaving the hooded aliens onstage. The pyramid took off skyward then exploded. To the audience’s amazement,

the band members revealed themselves as the hooded aliens, as if they had been transported from the exploding pyramid to the stage. The pyramids were used as space ships, which signified man’s ability to travel through the cosmos physically while the original pyramids of Giza signify traveling spiritually as they have been considered gateways to the afterlife.

The largest of the pyramids at Giza, the pyramid of Khufu, which is also called the Great Pyramid, provides the greatest riddle. Often characterized as a book in stone, it can be shown that its shape and orientation toward the north release a kind of energy, which provides maintenance of the life forces and aids to preservation. It is suspected that the large pyramids of Giza involve a kind of dedication center, in which the initiates are led through various stages to enlightenment. On the path, the disciple passes through the death process to the other side, then returns transformed to the world of the living. This ritual is similar to Earth, Wind & Fire’s reappearance from the pyramids on stage. When the band members are standing in front of the audience, they are figuratively returning to the world of the living, which is represented by the audience. This stage act is open to interpretation.

Paul Gilroy, sociologist and Professor of American and English Literature at King’s College London, interprets the space themes used by funk and soul artists as satirically representational of the desperation and frustration in certain segments of the

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25 White, 235.

African-American community, as neither of the political poles of nonviolence or militancy were proven efficient. Therefore, the space vehicle, as an extension of the tropes of transit, signifies freedom and liberation by creating a modern meeting site that travels to outer space as the social, political, and economic conditions for many African Americans during the 1970s were not consistently improving. Wayne Vaughn, a musician and close friend of Maurice White, also gave insight about the extravagant EWF concerts.

Wayne Vaughn is from Los Angeles, California, and attended Los Angeles City College and the University of California at Los Angeles, where he majored in music composition. He worked with Quincy Jones and the Brothers Johnson. While on tour with the Brothers Johnson, he met his wife, Wanda Hutchinson, who is a member of the female soul group, The Emotions. Wanda introduced Wayne to Maurice White around 1978. Wayne Vaughn is a songwriter and composer who worked on the hit songs “Let’s Groove” and “Side by Side.” When discussing the pyramids in the concerts, Wayne Vaughn stated,

They were more or less going into the mystic, the illusion. But don’t forget back in 1974 when they had Verdine levitate. It was just representing the fact that man, probably back in the pyramid days, had more mystical powers, had a third eye. How did they make the pyramids? They still can’t make a pyramid today. There’s a lot of unanswered questions. If you stretch your intellectual curiosity, things that you think you know, the smarter you get, you know that you don’t know nothing. The more information you receive, the more questions you come up with. I think Maurice was trying to bring in a little curiosity, a little “you gone

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find out for yourself” kind of thing of things he was experimenting or discovering or questioning himself.\textsuperscript{28}

The pyramid is basically a symbol of ancient mysticism. Today, people still wonder how the Great Pyramid was built. The pyramid is also featured on the \textit{All ‘N All} album cover and other albums that followed.

As stated previously, \textit{All ‘N All} was released in 1977. Maurice White’s ongoing interest in many world religions and mythologies became the central themes for the album: holiness and mysticism, not politics. Al McKay came up with the title of the album. White wanted to name the album \textit{All . . . something}. Al McKay suggested \textit{All in All}, and White agreed with him.\textsuperscript{29} The cover for this album displays Kemetic symbols and the inside sleeve displays symbols from different world religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, as well as ancient Egyptian spirituality. White explained the use of those symbols, “For instance, on EWF’s \textit{All ‘N All} album, I put a lot of symbols on there purposely to create some curiosity so that people would think and start to raise questions about what life is about, and think about all the symbols that they had been seeing all these years.”\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{All ‘N All} coincided with the popularity of \textit{Star Wars}, also released in 1977. When Maurice White first saw the film, he was blown away. He told the band, “We gotta do something like that.” According to Philip Bailey, that is why Earth, Wind &

\textsuperscript{28}Wayne Vaughn, Interview with the author. Atlanta, GA, March 15, 2017.

\textsuperscript{29}Bailey, 178.

\textsuperscript{30}Van Matre.
Fire featured a pyramid spaceship onstage, combining it with a love of the metaphysics of Egyptology.\(^{31}\) The cover and inside sleeve for *All ‘N All* exemplifies White’s love for Egyptology and metaphysics. *All ‘N All* is the first of several Earth, Wind & Fire albums to feature cover art by Japanese artist Shusei Nagaoka.

Shusei Nagaoka’s real name was Shuzo Nagaoka. He was born in 1936 in Nagasaki, Japan. He grew up offshore in Iki, Japan. He moved there before Nagasaki was destroyed by an atomic bomb in 1945. Nagaoka quit Musashino University before completing his studies and went on to establish his career as an illustrator. After moving to the United States in 1970, he based himself in Hollywood and produced album covers for popular artists, including the Carpenters, Electric Light Orchestra, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Nagaoka returned to Japan during the first decade of the twenty-first century and died in 2015.\(^{32}\)

When Maurice White began working with Shusei Nagaoka, it was difficult to communicate because of the language barrier. White could not speak Japanese and Nagaoka did not speak English. White began their first meeting by showing him pictures in his Egyptian coffee table book as well as books on UFOs. White pointed to the pictures and nodded and Nagaoka began to draw. After that, White gathered bits of paper and drew religious and other iconic symbols on them. White placed the symbols in a

\(^{31}\) Bailey, 179.

pattern on the paper, and Nagaoka started to draw them. Somehow, they communicated. The result was the outside cover and the gatefold for *All 'N All*. White was highly satisfied. Nagaoka’s skill led him to illustrate more album covers for Earth, Wind & Fire.

The cover for *All 'N All* is perhaps the most elaborate of all Earth, Wind & Fire’s album covers. It is a visual representation of all that can be most easily expressed in music or painting; elements of changing times; symbols of those things which have most influenced our behavior, for example, religion, arts, sciences; and exciting visions of what the future has in store for the human race.

On the front, there is a large pyramid with a bright light at its apex. The pyramid is set on top of the Great Temple at Abu Simbel. At Abu Simbel are two temples that were carved in a mountainside beside the Nile River in southern Egypt. Pharaoh Ramses II built the temples in the 1200s B.C. The Great Temple, which is primarily depicted on the album cover, extended 200 feet into the mountainside. Four seated figures of Ramses II, each 67 feet high, guarded the entrance. Four figures of Ramses II and two of his wife, Queen Nefertari, stood at the entrance of the smaller temple. At the Great Temple, beneath the seated figures of Ramses II are carved figures of bound captives. Next to the giant figures of the Pharaoh, members of his family – including Nefertari, his

33 White, 229.


mother Muttuya, as well as several children – stand at his feet. Sun-worshipping baboons are carved above the temple’s façade. Above the temple’s entrance is a statue of the sun-god Ra, holding signs for power and truth, thus forming a rebus, Ramses II’s throne name. In the sanctuary, at the heart of the temple, are statues of four gods: Ptah, Amun, Ra, and the deified Ramses II.

Egyptologist Richard Wilkinson details Abu Simbel. He explains that in many ways a fusion of ‘divine’ and mortuary temples, the Great Temple was constructed to face eastwards so that the sun’s rays illuminated the façade each morning. First, the sunlight lit the row of baboons (symbolic greeters of the sun gods). Then, as the sun rose, its rays illuminated the four colossal statues of Ramses II and the central niche statue of Ra. Finally, the solar rays entered the temple itself. The temple’s axis was aligned in such a way that twice each year, in February and October, the solar rays penetrated 200 feet through the inner halls to the very depths of the rock-cut monument where they illuminated the statues of the deified Ramses II and his companion gods.36 The back of the album cover features a space ship in the shape of a pyramid. This suggests man’s ability to travel through the cosmos, physically and spiritually. As stated previously, pyramids are seen as gateways to the spiritual realm. The space ship represents man’s power to travel in outer space. The inside sleeve is just as elaborate as the outside cover.

On the inside sleeve, a pyramid is shown with an eye upon it. There is also the Great Sphinx, which shall be discussed later in this chapter. In addition to those popular

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Kemetic symbols, there are symbols from different major religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Kemetic spirituality. The religious symbols and space ship are also displayed on the cover for the “Fantasy” single. The additional Kemetic symbols shown on the inside sleeve are the Bennu bird, the eye of Heru (Horus), and the ankh.

The ankh is a prominent symbol of Kemetic spirituality. Since the ankh has been the symbol of eternal life, in this world and in the afterlife, it is connected with tradition in modern times in that it was adopted as the cross of the Coptic Christians in Egypt. In many representations, the gods are holding an ankh in their hand or extending it to people. This involves the “breath of life” made visible, to some extent the divine spark, through which life can first come into existence. It also embodies the life-giving characteristics of the elements of air and water.37 There seems to be more than one interpretation involving the ankh.

The ankh does not just represent life, but also resurrection, because the ankh is put together by a T-shaped cross and an oval, and that is supposed to symbolize re-incarnation and is “the key to the gates of life and death.” Some scholars believe the ankh is put together by the sun and the “T” is the horizon over the Nile River. An early version of the symbol is supposed to symbolize both sunrise and sunset. The ankh may also represent combinations such as the key to the Nile River and the union between Isis

37 Owusu, 167.
and Osiris. It may represent life and immortality, life and man and woman, and holy
matrimony between gods and goddesses. The primary meaning for the ankh is “life.”

A mysterious Kemetic symbol on the inside sleeve of the All “N All cover is the
eye of Heru (Horus). Heru was an Egyptian sun god with the head shaped like a falcon.
The eye of Heru is found frequently in ancient Egyptian art. It is also known as Egyptian
eye or Psychic eye. The sun and the moon were the eyes of Heru. The Heru eye
embodied the eternally returning restoration of universal harmony. According to myth,
the envious Set tore the eye from his nephew Heru after he killed and dismembered his
father, Osiris. The moon god, Thoth, restored the eye and healed it. Heru then brought
the eye to his father in order for him to give it new life. Since then, the Heru eye has
been considered the prototype of the sacrifice ceremony. The left eye of Heru
represented the moon and the past and it received feminine forces. The right eye
embodied masculine forces of the sun and the future. Together, the two eyes guaranteed
the power of omniscience. Therefore, it promised eternal life.

A third Kemetic symbol is a bird which could be the Bennu bird or a Ba from
Egyptian mythology. The Bennu bird was an imaginary bird resembling a heron. It has
long feathers on the crest of its head and was often crowned with the Atef crown of Osiris
or with the disk of the sun; the Bennu was the sacred bird of Heliopolis. The Bennu was

38 “The Symbols,” The EWF Experience, accessed June 10, 2016,
http://www.homdrum.net/ewf/symbols.html.

39 Homdrum, “The Symbols.”

40 Owusu, 139.
associated with the sun and represented the Ba or soul of the sun god, Ra. In the Late Period, the bird was used to represent Ra directly. As a symbol of the rising sun, the Bennu was also the lord of the royal jubilee.\textsuperscript{41}

The religious symbols on the inside sleeve and the Kemetic symbols on the cover signify man’s quest to connect with the creator. When asked about the meaning of the cover for \textit{All ‘N All}, Maurice White answered, “Represents the one God.”\textsuperscript{42} White believed there is more than one way to connect with the one God. He explained “Spiritually, we don’t have to walk the same path. I’m not speaking in terms of any denominational religion. I’m talking about a more universal thing. But people should make sure that whatever path they walk is a positive one to instill good things in yourself and others.”\textsuperscript{43} The front cover art for \textit{All ‘N All} is also showcased in a music video for the hit single “Serpentine Fire.” “Serpentine Fire” is a song about yoga and creative energy and it is discussed in chapter four. The video begins with an image of Abu Simbel with the pyramid on top. The camera zooms into the temple and the band performs the song. As the song ends, the camera zooms back to the front exterior of the temple.\textsuperscript{44} Since Abu Simbel is a temple, the band’s performance inside suggests that a

\textsuperscript{41}“The Symbols,” The EWF Experience.

\textsuperscript{42}Davi, Interview with Maurice White, 2005.

\textsuperscript{43}Van Matre.

spiritual ritual is taking place. After the success of *All 'N All*, Earth, Wind & Fire released a compilation album in 1978 titled *The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Volume I*.

*The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. 1*

*The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. 1* includes hit songs previously released and two newly released singles: “Got to Get You into My Life” and “September.” On the cover of this album is the full image of the ancient Egyptian god Heru, also known as Horus. “Horus” is the Greek name for Heru. Heru is depicted as a falcon with wings spread while holding a shen ring and an ankh in each of its talons. A shen ring is a circle with a line at a tangent to it, which was represented in hieroglyphics as a loop of a rope. In wall paintings, it is often worn by divine animals, such as the hawk. It symbolized eternal protection. People also liked to wear this symbol of the eternal cycle as an amulet for protection against diseases and disaster.\(^{45}\) As stated previously, the ankh also represents eternal life. By holding the shen rings and the ankhs, Heru appears to have control of life eternal.

Heru is one of the most prominent gods of ancient Egypt. In *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Mordechai Gilula discussed Heru. His name is generally believed to have been derived from the root *hr*, which means ‘to be far,’ namely ‘He who is far away.’ This is an interpretation which seems to fit well the original concept of Heru as a sky god. When Heru referred to himself, he stated, “I am Heru distant of place from

\(^{45}\) Owusu, 167.
people and gods.” There is a common phrase which states “He is far from the gods; his ways are hidden from those who dwell upon earth.”\textsuperscript{46} This phrase suggests that Heru is a supreme god who dwells among the Heavens. His name itself is a testament to his character.

Gilula further explains that the ancient Egyptians believed that names were an integral part of an entity, designating its essence or a special trait or feature, the basic notion being that the owner of a name became endowed with all the powers connected with it etymologically. The bearer of a particular name or title sometimes received it because he or she possessed certain qualities, or because of certain acts he or she performed. In some cases, a name may be created specifically for single use to make a certain act possible.\textsuperscript{47} The name of Heru exemplifies his greatness and supremacy.

Rudolf Anthes gave additional information about Heru in the \textit{Journal of Near Eastern Studies}. In addition to the concept that Heru, the falcon, was the king of Egypt, there were other concepts of Heru, namely, Heru the Lord of Heaven, and Heru the son of Asar. As to the meaning of the identity of Heru, there is good reason to make it conceivable by calling it a trinity of Horus the falcon, the king of Egypt, and the Lord of Heaven. The trinity of Heru may be called the concept of the universal god if we accept the definition that the universal god rules heaven and all the other gods and the entire


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 260.
earth, and is worshipped and served by mankind. The concept of a trinity is also found in Christianity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Egyptian trinity concept is hundreds of years older than the Christian trinity concept. Both trinity concepts represent the Supreme Being or Most High God. The depiction of Heru suggests the ancient Egyptians had a connection to the Supreme Being. By displaying Heru, Maurice White and Earth, Wind & Fire confirm there are different paths to the Most High God alternative to the major monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Before the current major religions were developed, mankind developed other religions and the ancient Egyptian religion was created long before the three major religions. Ancient Egyptians spirituality is displayed on the cover of I Am.

**I Am**

*I Am* was released in the summer of 1979. It features the hit singles “In the Stone,” “After the Love is Gone,” and “Boogie Wonderland.” “I Am” is the name of the Hebrew God who revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14. The front cover of *I Am* does not display any symbols relating to Judaism or Christianity. Instead, it displays the columns of an ancient Egyptian temple underneath a bright sun with a fetus and man inside. The columns of the temple displayed on the album have no covering or roof. The columns consist of humanoid figures and hieroglyphs. The Egyptians built some of the most amazing temples in the ancient world with massive columns.

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According to Richard Wilkinson, the halls of columns in Egyptian temples held symbolic meanings. In Egyptian mythology, the celestial realm of the sky was supported above the earth on columns, which are often shown as a framing device at the sides of temple representations. The columns can be seen as cosmic pillars, so that statements such as that made by Amenophis III regarding the temple of Karnak, “Its pillars reach heaven like the four pillars of heaven,” contain a symbolic truth beyond the obvious hyperbole. The pillars of the temple symbolize the pathway to heaven or God. Since people worshipped in the temple among the pillars, their worship could bring them closer to God.

According to the Kemetic worldview, the temple stood at the nexus of the three spheres of heaven, earth, and the netherworld. It served as a kind of portal by which gods and men might pass from one realm to the other. In the same way the temple pylon functioned symbolically as an akhet or ‘horizon’ in terms of the solar cycle, so the whole temple functioned as a type of temporal and special akhet. Just as the physical horizon is the interface between heaven and earth – and in terms of the setting sun between today and tomorrow, the present and the future, this world and the beyond – so the temple was regarded as an akhet or interface between these two spheres or realms and was often described as such. Therefore, the temple on the album cover represents man’s

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50 Ibid., 79.
connection to the spiritual realm, and even God himself. The inside sleeve of the *I Am* cover is also intriguing.

On the inside sleeve is a majestic drawing of all nine members of the band dressed in elaborate costumes. Surrounding the image of the band are several symbols, including mythical animals, a male Egyptian pouring grain, scales, an archer on a horse, and a male and female conjoined; these images are used to enhance the background. On the back of the album cover is a drawing of an aerial view of a Kemetic landscape, featuring pyramids, other buildings, and pyramid-shaped space ships. These symbols represent the wonders of Kemetic architecture.

In *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization*, historian and educational consultant Anthony Browder describes architecture as one of the most powerful expressions of human creativity. Incorporated within temples and monuments are elements relating to art, physical sciences, psychology, and religion. Architectural structures serve numerous functions. They provide shelter and serve as gathering places where people work, play, pray, and are entertained. Structures may also serve as tombs for royalty. The philosophy of a nation is often reflected in its architecture. This is definitely true for ancient Egypt. According to Browder, Ancient Egyptian architecture also has incorporated within its physical structure aspects of ancient knowledge which can easily be interpreted and other elements which defy analysis. Many structures from ancient

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Egypt are esoteric and overwhelm the senses, such as the Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid. Kemetic architecture transmits a subliminal message into the consciousness of any individual who is spiritually and mentally prepared to receive it. It is no wonder Maurice White decided to use Kemetic symbols. He stated his mission to raise the consciousness of his audiences with spiritual messages, which can be conveyed through images and symbolism. The display of architectural symbols, religious symbols, and others exemplify Maurice White’s passion for Kemetic spirituality.

Maurice White took the band on a vacation to Egypt, a country he had visited twice before owing to his strong interest in Egyptology. This interest is reflected in the cover art of *I Am* and its predecessor *All ’N All*. White declared, “Half the band loved it. Half of them hated it. Everyone didn’t share the same beliefs. I was into metaphysics and everyone else wasn’t so that caused somewhat of a separation within the core of the group.”

Philip Bailey recalled a confrontation with Maurice White about his spiritual belief.

In 1978, Earth, Wind & Fire went on a European tour with Santana. By this time, Bailey had become a born-again Christian. On the way to Germany, he and a few of the band members were studying the Bible. Maurice White saw them and got irritated. He asked them what they were doing. Bailey told him that they were studying the Word of

52 Ibid., 98.

White Grimaced. “Hmmm. That’s funny, because God never wrote no book. The white man wrote a book to keep black people in bondage.” White and Bailey had come to a parting of the ways in their beliefs, but they did not have a huge falling out over religion. The dynamics of the band changed as other members embarked on similar spiritual journeys. But since Maurice White was the leader of the band, he decided how the album art should look. A Kemetic theme is also displayed on the band’s following album: *Faces*.

*Faces*

Earth, Wind & Fire released *Faces* in the autumn of 1980. This album featured the singles “You,” “And Love Goes On,” and “Let Me Talk.” On the front cover of the album, the nine band members are standing around an Egyptian-styled pyramid illuminated at its vortex. Surrounding the band members is a diverse group of people of different ethnicities. This is the third EWF album to display a pyramid on the cover. On the other albums, the pyramids signify gateways to heaven. On *Faces*, the pyramid may signify enlightenment and universal love. The many faces around the pyramid may suggest what can be accomplished when many people come together for a common cause. The pyramids of Egypt required thousands of laborers and long hours of work. The most famous and phenomenal pyramids in Egypt are those at Giza, including the Great Pyramid.

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54 Bailey, 158-159.
Richard Proctor wrote about the complexity of the Great Pyramid in *The North American Review*. There was an enormous amount of labor bestowed upon the pyramids’ construction. The mere mass of masonry in the Great Pyramid amounted to nearly ninety million cubic feet. In weight, it amounted to nearly seventy million tons. The base covers a space of about thirteen acres. The second pyramid covers about eleven acres, contains six million cubic feet, and the mass of stone-work is at least five million tons. The materials of which the pyramid is built were brought from considerable distances.\(^{55}\) The Great Pyramid consists of more than one million stones and scholars believe it took more than twenty years to build this monument. The builders of the pyramid relied on cooperation and ambition among laborers. Cooperation and universal love are themes found in the philosophy of Earth, Wind & Fire. Other Kemetic symbols can be found in the promotional video for the single on the *Faces* album titled “Let Me Talk.”

“Let Me Talk” was released in September 1980. It is a song about problems going on in the world in the 1980s, such as inflation, nuclear weapons, and the struggle for oil and encourages people to discuss solutions for the problems. Earth, Wind & Fire released a video for the single. The ‘music video’ became a popular advertising strategy for pop music artists in 1981 when *Music Television (MTV)* was created. However, at that time, *MTV* refused to play videos by Black music artists. Music videos by Black artists could be seen in other spaces, such as *Soul Train* and *Video Soul*, which aired on the Black Entertainment Network (BET). A music video not only disseminates the

\(^{55}\) Proctor, 260.
music; it almost universally represents and circulates the performer. Although the image track may include narrative, graphic, or documentary visuals, it invariably (even if sometimes briefly or intermittently) shows the performer performing. The music thus gains diegetic (narrative) status, and appears to come from the world the video depicts.56 This is a good description for the “Let Me Talk” video.

*Let Me Talk*

The music video for “Let Me Talk” features Earth, Wind & Fire performing in front of still and moving photography. The photography features symbols from different cultures around the world, including several Kemetic symbols. According to Ralph Johnson, “It was about including all of it in all the media that we were producing at that time.”57 The Kemetic symbols shown in the video are the ankh, pyramids, scarab, the eye of Heru, the royal cartouche of Tutankhamun, also known as King Tut, King Tut’s death mask, and the goddess Nekhbet.58

Nekhbet is the great vulture goddess of ancient Egypt, the grand dame of the Egyptian pantheon. She is the wisdom keeper and the alchemist who knows what needs to happen on Earth for the connection between heaven and heart to happen. Nekhbet is portrayed as a vulture, great wings outspread while holding shens in her talons above the temple. It is she who grants passage into the temple. It is Nekhbet who grants passage


into the temple and serves as its guardian. She is the elder sage clan grandmother who prepares her children for their journey into the mysteries; she assesses their readiness for the journey. No one enters the mystery without approval from the great crone (wise woman), Nekhbet.

Nekhbet is associated with the sign Virgo in ancient Egyptian astrology. Virgo is the last of the six signs associated with the development of an individual. Virgo’s job is to perfect an individual’s expression so he or she might better enter relationship with others. In the purest sense, Virgo refers to the ‘virgin’ – a woman who is whole and complete to herself. This does not mean she does not relate to others. She simply does not need others to feel complete. The virgin is the essence of the priestess whose spiritual path is her guiding light in life. Her spiritual work comes before all else and nothing deters her from her path. The same is the case for Mother Nekhbet.\footnote{Linda Star Wolf and Ruby Falconer, \textit{Shamanic Egyptian Astrology: Your Planetary Relationship to the Gods} (Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2010), 110-111.} The symbol for Nekhbet is displayed on the famous death mask of King Tut which is also shown in the video.

The death mask of King Tut is made of gold in the image of the deceased pharaoh. Gold was believed to have a magical potency containing significant religious properties. Gold did not tarnish or deteriorate and it shone like the sun god and was therefore credited with the powers of the sun god. It was referred to as the “Flesh of the
Gods.” The mask was used to cover the face of the pharaoh’s mummy and ensure that his spirit would be able to recognize the body.

The design of the mask depicts the traditional nemes headdress. The nemes was the striped head cloth which would have been worn by King Tut. The top of the nemes displays the uraeus and the vulture on the brow. The uraeus was a rearing cobra emblem associated with the “eye” of the sun and meant to protect the pharaoh by spitting fire at his enemies. The cobra snake is an emblem for the goddess Wadjet and the vulture is an emblem for the goddess Nekhbet. Wadjet was the patron goddess of Lower Egypt and was associated with the land where the cobra was present. Nekhbet was the patron goddess of Upper Egypt and was associated with the vulture. These two goddesses together were known as ‘two ladies of the pharaoh’ and their special purpose was to protect the pharaoh. The mask also depicts King Tut holding the crook and flail.60

Zahi Hawass declares that the crook and flail were shown in art where pharaohs held one of the items in each arm crossed on their chests. These items of regalia are also held by Osiris, primordial king of Egypt and ruler of the dead. The king carried the crook and flail at his coronation and again on occasions when he renewed his power. The wrapped form of the crook, originally a shepherd’s tool, became a hieroglyph for ‘ruler.’ The flail, tentatively identified as a flywhisk, appears as a royal symbol in early Egyptian history. Together, the crook and flail could be construed as representing power and

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responsibility: the coercive might of the flail and the gentle guidance of the crook.\textsuperscript{61} Another symbol seen in the video which is associated with King Tut is his royal cartouche.

Alan Gardiner explained that the cartouche depicts a loop formed by a double thickness of rope, the ends tied together to offer to the spectator the appearance of a straight line. Strictly speaking, the loop should be round, but it becomes elongated and oval because of the length of most hieroglyphic names enclosed in it. It is likely that the purpose for the cartouche was to represent the king as ruler of all ‘that which is encircled by the sun,’ a frequently expressed notion.\textsuperscript{62} On the cartouche of King Tut, the three hieroglyphs at the top make up the name ‘Amun’ and are placed at the most important position. The bird with the two loaves of bread reads ‘Tut’ and to the left of the bird is the ankh which represents life. On the bottom row, the crook which means ‘ruler’ is accompanied by two signs representing the city of Thebes.\textsuperscript{63} An object decorated with a person’s name would belong to that person for eternity.

In King Tut’s tomb, a large chest in the shape of a cartouche was discovered. According to Zahi Hawass, it symbolizes the circuit of the sun and thus represents the known world over which the king had dominion, at least theoretically. On the upper


\textsuperscript{62} Alan Henderson Gardiner, \textit{Egyptian Grammar} (London: Griffin Institute, 1996), 74.

surface is the famous image of the cartouche. There are large recognizable hieroglyphs, displaying the king’s modified birth name, Tutankhamun, followed by the epithet “Ruler of Upper Egyptian Heliopolis.” The original city of Heliopolis was the worship center of the sun god, Ra. Inside the band of the cartouche around Tutankhamun’s birth name are more of his names, titles and epithets. Three of the royal names also appear on the flat end of the base, and names, titles, and epithets also appear in three horizontal registers around the curved part of the base.64 With the discovery of King Tut’s tomb and the finding of the treasure chest in the shape of cartouche, modern people now know the many names, titles, and epithets of this boy king who ruled during ancient times. The cartouche signifies the power and prestige of the king. Another unique Egyptian symbol seen in the video is the scarab.

The scarab is an artifact that represents the holy beetle in ancient Egypt. As Anthony Browder suggests, the beetle symbolizes the resurrection and immortality of God as represented by the sun. The scarab lays its eggs in a ball of dung, which it rolls across the ground in a direction that follows the sun. The heat of the sun warms the eggs inside the dung ball, which undergo a metamorphosis through the larva and nymph stages before emerging into the light of day as winged scarabs. The ball of dung symbolizes matter. The eggs symbolize potential, and the newly born scarab represents spiritual rebirth.65 All these symbols and others converge to help make an elaborate and intriguing

64 Zahi Hawass, 242.

music video. The symbols in the video suggest that we should seek knowledge from Kemet and other ancient civilizations, such as those in eastern Asia and Mesoamerica to find solutions to problems in the modern world.

The purpose of music videos and all forms of advertisement is to attract the attention of viewers and make them interested in a product. The “Let Me Talk” video is an attention grabber. Because they used Kemetic and other ancient symbols, Earth, Wind & Fire received negative criticism. According to Maurice White, EWF, along with KISS, the Rolling Stones, and other rock acts, was accused of having demonic messages via backward masking on their recordings. 66 Maurice said that for EWF, it was a damnable lie. They were going to pass legislation in California to try to prove it. 67 This belief is based on ignorance and/or the preconceived notion that ancient Egypt was a wicked nation. No matter how people may respond to the video, it serves Maurice White’s purpose: to stimulate curiosity. Earth Wind & Fire continued the use of Kemetic symbols for their next album cover.

Raise

Raise was released in 1981. It features the hit singles “Let’s Groove,” “I’ve Had Enough,” and the Grammy-award-winning “Wanna Be with You.” The album was titled Raise because the band sought to continue their mission of raising the consciousness of

66 White, 297.

67 After searching, no information was found about who the exact accusers were.
their listeners. The album cover art was designed by Roger Carpenter and illustrated by Shusei Nagaoka. This is the fourth album by Earth, Wind & Fire in which the cover art was illustrated by Nagaoka. On the front cover is an image of an ancient Egyptian female figure, perhaps a goddess or a noble woman. The figure appears to represent two time periods. The left side looks futuristic while the right side looks ancient. The back of the cover displays a female lying in a sarcophagus. The left side of the sarcophagus is purple and the right side is blue. The sarcophagus appears to be hypermodern.

In ancient Egypt, a coffin, often called a sarcophagus, was one of the most important items purchased by royalty and other elites. A coffin’s purpose was to protect the body, preserving it from deterioration or mutilation. “Sarcophagus” is a Greek term. In the ancient Egyptian language, the coffin might be called “neb ankh” (possessor of life). There are other words for coffins and sarcophagi, but perhaps the most relevant are ‘wet’ and ‘suhet.’ The term wet appears to be derived from the words for “mummy bandage” and to embalm. The ancient Egyptians were attracted to word play, so it is likely no coincidence that another word, wetet, which sounds similar, means to beget. In other words, from the coffin, the deceased will be reborn. This suggestion of two or more meanings is strengthened by the word suhet, used for “inner coffins” or perhaps “mummy board.” This is also the word for egg, from which new life emerges.68 The themes of life and renaissance are displayed on the Raise album cover.

The illustrations of the two-sided female figure on the front cover and the two-sided sarcophagus on the back cover signify a return to the ancient ideals the Egyptians valued. Maurice White believed modern people should study the philosophy of the ancients Egyptians. For White, Egypt is the place where it all started and where it will all end. Earth, Wind & Fire continued to use Kemetic symbols when they released music on their next album, "Powerlight."

Fall in Love with Me

"Powerlight" was released in the winter of 1983. It features the hit singles “Fall in Love with Me” and “Side by Side.” A video was produced for “Fall in Love with Me.” It displays Earth, Wind & Fire’s affection for Egyptian imagery and symbolism. The video shows Maurice White and his love interest along with the other band members dancing in a Kemetic landscape. The video also features Kemetic symbols flashing throughout.

The first Kemetic symbols to appear in the videos are statues of a king and queen, like those found at the Great Temple at Abu Simbel. The statues at the Great Temple represent Ramses II and his great wife Nefertari. In the video, Maurice White appears from one statue and his female love interest appears from the other. The claim has been made that Ramses II had a great love for Nefertari. Perhaps the statues represent the romantic love all people should strive to attain. After all, the title of the

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69 “The Symbols,” The EWF Experience.

song is “Fall in Love with Me.” Standing next to the statues are two columns with images of Heru on top. As stated previously, the columns can be seen as cosmic pillars, symbolizing the pathway to heaven or God and Horus was a supreme god who dwelled in the Heavens. In the center of the landscape, behind the statues, is the most famous Kemetic monument, the Great Pyramid.

The fact that the Great Pyramid was engineered with accuracies measured to the hundredths of an inch is a testimonial to its builders having possessed a sophisticated knowledge of mathematics.\(^\text{71}\) In the video, the Great Pyramid is shown with the inside design visible. The monument consists of passages and chambers. Anthony Browder declares that one of the most precisely constructed passages in the pyramid is the Descending Passage. It points to the northern skies at an angle of 26 degrees 17 minutes which, when subtracted from the pyramid’s latitudinal angle of nearly 30 degrees, provides a view within 3 degrees 43 minutes of the celestial pole. This is a perfect angle for watching the transit of circumpolar stars across the entrance opening. Another passage called the Ascending Passage angles off from the Descending Passage at 26 degrees 17 minutes and is the precise angle for light reflection.\(^\text{72}\) These passages lead to rooms called chambers.

Located deep inside the confines of the Great Pyramid is a room referred to as the “King’s Chamber.” Anthony Browder believes it is called this for chauvinistic reasons.

\(^\text{71}\) Browder, 106.

\(^\text{72}\) Ibid., 108.
Because it is the larger of the two rooms in the pyramid, it must have been built for the king and the smaller one was obviously built for the queen. The Queen’s Chamber is made of limestone and the King’s Chamber is made of granite. Inside the King’s Chamber, there are two shafts which were cut through 200 feet of solid stone to the outer surface of the pyramid.

The shafts inside the King’s Chamber face in a northerly and southerly direction and have long been regarded as “air shafts” that ventilated the chamber. Recent evidence has been presented which shows shafts are inclined, within one degree of accuracy, to the northern celestial pole, and to the three stars of Orion’s Belt to the south. It has been suggested that these openings were meant as symbolic guideways for the soul, guiding it either towards the stars in the northern sky or to the constellation of Orion in the southern sky. The passages, chambers, and shafts inside this structure of stone solidify the notion that the Great Pyramid is one of the most remarkable monuments ever built. The pyramid has a sophisticated design. This wonder of the ancient world is a testimonial to the advanced knowledge and technology of the ancient Egyptians. Another great monument constructed in ancient Egypt is the Sphinx at the Giza Plateau.

An image of the Sphinx also appears in the “Fall in Love with Me” video. In The Science News-Letter, Martha Morrow wrote that the Sphinx, also known as the Great Sphinx, is a symbol of strength and mystery. It is a large monolithic statue of a lion’s body with a human head. It is the largest royal portrait ever made. The face is 13 feet 8

73 Ibid., 108-109.
inches across. It is believed by many to portray Khafre, the king who built the second largest pyramid frequently pictured in the Great Sphinx’s background. The Sphinx is over 200 feet long and over 60 feet in height. For ages, it represented royal wisdom and might.  

No one knows exactly why the Sphinx was built. Many scholars believe that mixed images such as the Sphinx symbolize mankind's domination over wild beasts, and over chaos itself. Such images as the Sphinx may very well represent animal power tamed by human intelligence and thus transformed into divine calm. Traditionally, mixed, or composite images were almost always seen as divine. One way or the other, what could be more dangerous and powerful, or more self-assured than the king of the jungle with the mind of a human king?

According to Anthony Browder, the body of the beast symbolically represents the animal nature which exists in man and the lion exemplifies the royalty and power of the divine spirit that exists in its lower physical form. The head of a man symbolizes the intelligence of the mind which must be cultivated to elevate the consciousness into a higher spiritual state so that it may become divine. Metaphorically speaking, it is the suppression of the lower animal nature and the refinement of the thought process that leads to the spiritual evolution of man. Spiritually speaking, only by conquering the


“beast” within can a person be capable of truly knowing God.\textsuperscript{76} In addition to the Great Sphinx, there are other smaller sphinxes shown in the video.

In the video, there are two rows of ram-headed sphinxes, sometimes called criosphinxes. As explained by Martha Morrow, more than a thousand sphinxes once guarded the road that connected the temples at Karnak and Luxor. The temple of Karnak was regarded as the earthly palace of the god Amun and the temple of Luxor was his southern home. The road connecting the two, like many other great avenues in Egypt, was lined on both sides with sphinxes.\textsuperscript{77} Each criosphinx originally held an image of the king protectively between its claws. These ram-headed sphinxes symbolize the procreative energy and power of the god Amun.

Richard Wilkinson described Amun as having been venerated in a number of roles but his identity as king of the gods and as a powerful fertility god were of primary importance. Amun was held to be a universal god who permeated the cosmos and all it contained. As the god who ‘exists in all things’ and the one in whom all gods are subsumed, Amun came close to being a kind of monotheistic deity and was sometimes revered as the \textit{ba} or soul of all natural phenomena.\textsuperscript{78} Another Kemetic god is also featured in the video: Anubis.

\textsuperscript{76} Browder, 113.

\textsuperscript{77} Morrow, 186.

Anubis is represented as a man with the head of a canine. Anubis was the most important funerary god before the rise of Asar, also known as Osiris. Originally, he appears to have been primarily concerned with the burial and afterlife of the king. Eventually, this role was extended to incorporate all the dead. Because Anubis was said to have prepared the mummy for Asar, he became the patron god of embalmers. In the video, there are eight outlined images of the god Anubis. Out of those eight images come the other eight members of Earth, Wind & Fire, and they dance with White’s female love interest. A few seconds later, a sarcophagus descends from the sky.

When the sarcophagus hits the ground, it disappears and Maurice White appears in its place. The sarcophagus is an ancient Kemetic coffin used to protect and preserve the body. It was also a place where new life emerges. In the video, White literally emerges from the sarcophagus. After that, he and the female both disappear but reappear seconds later. Perhaps, White had to undergo a rebirth to enter a decent relationship with the female. While the people in the video are dancing, two Kemetic goddesses appear.

In the video, there are images of two female goddesses facing each other with wings spread. Those goddesses are sisters Auset and Nebthet. The Greek name for Auset is Isis and the Greek name for Nebthet is Nephthys. In the Journal of Black Studies, Miriam Ma’At-Ka-Re Mongues described Auset as the most powerful and famous deity of the ancient world. She is the goddess most mentioned in the hieroglyphics. She had the power through her words to stop death and to bring the dead

79 Ibid., 187, 190.
back to life. Auset’s greatest display of power involved bringing her husband/brother, Asar, back to life.\textsuperscript{80} Auset’s sister, Nebthet, was a funerary goddess who usually played a subordinate role to Auset.

Richard Wilkinson declares that Nebthet became one of the major deities held to be protectors of the dead along with Auset. She was one of the four guardian deities of the canopic jars and of other items of the funerary assemblage in royal and private burials. There is an artifact in the Cairo Museum showing Auset and Nebthet protecting the djed column of Asar.\textsuperscript{81} The images of these goddesses in the video are similar to the image on the artifact. In the video, both goddesses have their wings spread as if they are protecting something. They appear at the end of the bridge of the song, and they fade away after about ten seconds. When the two goddesses appear on the screen, Maurice White and his love interest come together and dance in jubilation. Perhaps, it was the goddesses who ordained the love between White and his lover. The video for “Fall in Love with Me” is very intriguing. It features well-known Kemetic symbols and lesser known symbols which represent Kemetic spirituality, rebirth, and enlightenment.

\textit{Electric Universe}

\textit{Electric Universe} was released on November 4, 1983. It features the singles “Magnetic” and “Touch.” This album was the last one recorded during Earth, Wind &

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{80} Miriam Ma’At-Ka-Re Mongues, “Reflections on the Role of Female Deities and Queens in Ancient Kemet,” \textit{Journal of Black Studies} 23, no. 4 (June 1993), 564. \\
\end{flushleft}
Fire’s classic period. The cover for this album also featured a Kemetic symbol, but with a twist. *Electric Universe* is the fifth EWF album to feature a pyramid on the cover. A squared pyramid with a pyramid-like cone inside is displayed. Both figures are made of illuminated rings. This was an indication of the change happening in the music industry and the futuristic sound of some of the songs on the album. The pyramid and the cone represent ancient knowledge and modern information and technology. The ‘pyramid’ is the most common symbol used by EWF during their classic period. It is so common that many people believe the pyramid is the official symbol for EWF. But Verdine White has confirmed that there is no official symbol for the band. The pyramid, deities, and other Kemetic symbols helped shape EWF’s image and mysticism.

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In the late 1960s, when Maurice White decided to form his own band, there were several traumatic events taking place in America and around the world. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated in 1968. The Vietnam War was raging in Southeast Asia and race relations in the United States were tense. These events coincided with the apex of the Black Arts Movement. William C. Banfield, scholar of African-American music and professor at Berklee College of music, argues that during the Black Arts Movement, Black artists were united in their focus and concern, and they believed they had an obligation to lift the community. The artists focused on art as a concrete expression of sets of political and cultural principles. Their main hope was that the literary, musical and visual works of Black artists would be politically engaged and socially uplifting.  

Funk music, according to Rickey Vincent, is a deliberate reaction to – and a rejection of – the traditional Western world’s predilection for formality, pretense, and

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self-repression. In other words, funk music is a rejection of the limitations that Western civilization, America, in particular, has superimposed onto different genres of music. Teresa Reed states that in America, there has long been a line drawn between what is secular music and what is sacred. This concept was foreign to Africans who were kidnapped from their native land. They did not distinguish between music for secular use and music for sacred consumption. The notion that music outside of the church could not be sacred or spiritual was acquired from the Europeans. Some African-Americans have always rejected this notion, but funk musicians rejected it in a more bold and profound manner. Earth, Wind & Fire is a prime example. EWF incorporates spiritual messages into their song.

*Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines spiritual as relating to the spirit or the soul as distinguished from the body or material matters. Spiritual matters are also concerned with the intellect; intellectual. It also means being characterized by the ascendancy of the spirit; showing much refinement of thought and feeling. Spiritual matters deal with the supernatural. And spirituality means religious devotion or piety and the fact or state of being incorporeal. These definitions exemplify some of the themes found in the lyrics of Earth, Wind & Fire’s songs.

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4 *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed.
Earth, Wind & Fire was formed in 1969 and their primary mission has been to raise people to a higher level of consciousness. Maurice White - the band’s founder, visionary, and mentor - called it “the Concept.” He would talk about the concept for hours and stressed the importance of it. This ideal notion led the band to eventually present an unfamiliar spirituality by engaging ancient Egyptian themes in their visual art, and more importantly, in their lyrics.

Maurice White believed many of the world’s sciences started in Egypt. He professed, “This is the core reason I turned to Egyptology. It encourages self-respect.” Keyboardist Larry Dunn declared, “One brother said, ‘Because of you, I got off heroin.’” White also believed that African Americans were getting their self-respect from fraudulent sources. He declared, “Our history had been stolen and hijacked. Our rich culture didn’t start on slave ships or in cotton fields, and it sure didn’t start in the Cabrini-Green projects of Chicago.” White proclaimed, “It started in Egypt. Egypt gave the planet mathematics, astronomy, science, medicine, the written word, religion, symbolism, and spirituality. Despite what centuries of distortion have told us, the civilized world did not start in Europe; it started in Egypt.” For years, people in the West have been indoctrinated to believe human advances should be attributed to

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8 White, 147-148.
Europeans and Africans have contributed very little to human civilization. White detailed another purpose for Egyptology. He stated, “I definitely believe in eternity and past lives and all that. Egypt is always related to something that is secretive. So, I studied Egyptology to learn more about it. It was a major influence in directing the group in a certain direction. It made us stand alone, stand apart from the groups.”

The actual conception of EWF blossomed when White relocated to Los Angeles from Chicago. White recalled, “The first six months were rough, but one morning, while I was studying a book called The Laws of Success, which deals with inner-self, I decided that a group with a dynamic name and a new musical message was what I needed.”

White declared, “At first, I thought of “Fire” as a name, but that didn’t sound so cool. I figured that fire needed a couple of other elements, and my being heavily into the astrological charts, I consulted my horoscope sign (Sagittarius). I thought about water to put the fire out, but that didn’t jive – it was too conflicting. So, I came up with the idea of Earth and Wind – those elements would mesh and create an on-going bond, and that was exactly what the group needed.”

Earth, Wind & Fire have always been unique from their contemporaries: funk and soul bands. That was Maurice White’s goal from the beginning. He stated, “From the

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very start, I had a commitment to be different in terms of music and what was projected on stage. Coming out of a period of social confusion in the seventies, I wanted EWF to reflect the growing search for greater self-understanding, greater freedom from the restrictions we placed on ourselves in terms of individual potential.”¹² In the early 1970s, the Vietnam War was still raging and young men were being drafted. Racism was persisting and police brutality was a serious problem for African Americans. This discouraged many African Americans from realizing their dreams. Becoming a better person, reaching your greatest potential, and escaping negativity are ideals found in the ancient cosmological principles of Maat.

Denise Martin wrote in the *Journal of Black Studies* that Maat is a comprehensive construct that existed throughout ancient Egyptian civilization. In its cosmological sense, it is the principle of order that informs the creation of the universe. In its spiritual sense, Maat is a goddess representing order or balance. And in its philosophical sense, Maat is a moral and ethical principle that all Egyptians were expected to exemplify in their daily actions towards family, community, nation, environment and God.¹³

Maulana Karenga gives more detail about Maat. He declares that Maat, in its essential meaning, is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: the divine, the natural, and the social. In its broader sense, Maat is an interrelated order of

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rightness which requires and is the result of right relations with and right behavior
towards the divine, nature, and other humans. As moral thought and practice, Maat is a
way of rightness defined especially by the practice of the Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth,
justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. Lastly, as a foundation and
framework for the moral ideal and its practice, Maat is the constantly achieved condition
of and requirements for the ideal world, society, and person.\(^\text{14}\) Earth, Wind & Fire sang
about love, ethics, and ancient spiritual wisdom found in Kemetic philosophy. This
philosophy is exemplified in many songs recorded by EWFs, including “Keep Your Head
to the Sky,” which helped spark a string of hit songs that would be considered the basis of
the band’s classic period. When asked about a list of songs dealing with Egyptology,
Ralph Johnson replied, “The list of songs would be too numerous.” Johnson also
declared, “Maurice’s overall plan was to deliver a message of positivity, of how to
respect your fellow man, and a message of love. We embraced that and we just kept
going with it.”\(^\text{15}\) “Keep Your Head to the Sky” is certainly a song about positivity.

\textit{Head to the Sky}

“Keep Your Head to the Sky” was written by Maurice White. It is the second
track released from the album \textit{Head to the Sky}. The song espoused consciousness. EWF
wanted their audience to realize that to be young, gifted, and black, it was necessary to be
awake and sensitive to the inner as well as the outer person. At that time, the early


\(^\text{15}\) Ralph Johnson, Interview with the author. Atlanta, GA, March 16, 2017.
1970s, the song gave hope to young African Americans. White wanted the black men of Earth, Wind & Fire to inspire self-worthiness. His plan was to increase everyone’s level of ethnic consciousness, forcing them to transcend into a philosophy that embraced all of humanity for the planet’s higher good. Spiritual transcendence commentaries began to proliferate in the early and mid-1970s.

To some extent, according to James B. Stewart, former Director of the Black Studies Program at Pennsylvania State University, this type of commentaries reflects disillusionment with the failure of political advocacy and the American Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement to overcome structural inequalities. Between 1972 and 1975, the median income of black families was stagnant and the unemployment rate for black men jumped from 7.0 to 12.5 percent. Also, widespread resistance to busing to obtain public school desegregation arose during that time. These social conditions provide a context for the type of Spiritual Transcendence commentaries exemplified by “Keep Your Head to the Sky” (1973).16

Prior to writing “Keep Your Head to the Sky,” White had been questioning his purpose. He wanted to believe God was with him in spite of the challenges he was facing. The song is a testament to his faith.17 Some of the lyrics are as follows:

    Master told me one day
    I’d find peace in every way
    But in search for the clue
    Wrong things I was bound to do

17 White, 129-130.
Keep my head to the sky
For the clouds to tell me why
As I grew, and with strength
Master kept me as I repent and he said
Keep your head to the sky.\(^{18}\)

According to Maurice White, “Keep Your Head to the Sky” was built on simple universal truths, just like “That’s the Way of the World,” and “All About Love.”\(^{19}\) Universal truths can be found in many religions, including Kemetic spirituality, which is older than many of the world’s current major religions.

The spiritual and ethical impact of Maat can be found in “Keep Your Head to the Sky.” Maat gave the ancient Egyptians a sense of being at home in the world, a world in which evil could never be dominant for long and right would always be triumphant. In other words, consciousness of Maat provided a sense of confidence that goodness triumphs regardless of evil, disorder or other negatives in the world.\(^ {20}\) In this song, the listener is reminded to remain steadfast (keep your head to the sky) and keep the faith that good things will follow through in the end. This theme of optimism is found in several EWF songs. After the success of *Head to the Sky*, Earth, Wind & Fire released “Mighty Mighty” as the first single from their next album, *Open Our Eyes*.

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\(^{19}\) White, 349.

\(^{20}\) Karenga, 199.
Open Our Eyes

“Mighty Mighty” professes that people could overcome challenging circumstances with determination and self-belief. It encourages listeners to ignore negativity. The message was for everyone, especially African Americans, because racism is a blatant issue in America. This song encouraged people to have pride in themselves. Some of the lyrics are:

Walk around, why wear a frown
Say little people, try to put you down
What you need, a helpin' hand
All the strength, at your command

How's ya faith? Cause ya faith is you
Who you kiddin', to yourself be true
Spread ya love, for a brighter day
For what ya search, you'll find a way

We are people, of the mighty
Mighty people of the sun
In our hearts lies all the answers
To the truth you can't run from

This song reminds African Americans that they and other people of African descent have a connection to the sun-scorched region of the great civilization of Kemet (Ancient Egypt). Just as the Kemites possessed knowledge about the universe, so do African Americans, and people, in general. The truth is in the DNA and the two can’t be separated. African Americans are descended from West Africa, and West Africa has a connection to ancient Egypt. This argument is supported by scholars of African descent.

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21 White, 148.

When arguing for an African origin of civilization, Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop identifies totems, circumcision, kingship, social organization, and matriarchy as key areas that support the idea that ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa are variations of one cultural identity. Diop also traced the origin and development of precolonial African civilizations and societies to establish that they are connected by a distinct set of social, linguistic, historical, and political relationships that reach back to antiquity and span the continent. Another great scholar who supports the connection is John S. Mbiti.

John S. Mbiti is a Kenyan-born, Christian, religious philosopher who acknowledged that although there are variations in the beliefs, practices, and customs among people on the African continent, there is a distinguishable African ontology among cultural groups. This ontology is primarily a religious one and consists of five elements: god, spirits, man, plants/animals, and phenomena. This ontology can be seen in various peoples across the African continent. The two aforementioned scholars provided evidence that African Americans are connected to ancient Egypt, as implied in the song “Mighty Mighty.”

“Mighty Mighty” became a breakout record for Earth, Wind & Fire. Bob Cavallo, an Italian American who once managed EWF, believed the song could have been bigger if some people hadn’t perceived it as a black power message – or, as he used

23 Martin, 954.
to joke, “Mighty Mighty – kill the whitey.” 24 Another song released from Open Our Eyes is the title track “Open Our Eyes.”

“Open Our Eyes” is an old gospel song written by Leon Lumpkins and made popular by Jessy Dixon and the Gospel Cleffs. 25 Maurice White was familiar with gospel music. As a child, he attended Rose Hill Baptist Church, which he described as a Pentecostal church where women often fainted, causing fear in some of the children. At this same church, he heard a lot about Hell’s fire and brimstone from the pulpit, what people should and shouldn’t do, and the need to give your life to Jesus to avoid eternal damnation. 26 As he got older, he began to study other religions, especially Kemetic spirituality.

Maurice White’s affection for Egyptology may have encouraged him to interpret “Open Our Eyes” in a peculiar way. The song is basically a prayer for enlightenment. Philip Bailey explains, “Our mission was to tell people, ‘Hey, you’re naturally high, and you can maintain that natural high by discovering who you are — by opening your third eye. We weren’t just saying it, we were living it. …Maurice was the catalyst for all that. What we discovered through him is what we sang about.” 27 The third eye that Bailey referenced is represented by the eye of Heru which has been displayed in the visual art of

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24 White, 148.

25 Ibid., 141.

26 White, 9.

EWF. The third eye is the spiritual eye that gives a person inner vision. The lyrics to “Open Our Eyes” read

Father, open our eyes, that we may see, to follow thee. Oh Lord grant us, thy lovin' peace, and let all dissension cease. Let our faith, each day increase, and Master - Lord please- Open our eyes, open our eyes.

“Open Our Eyes,” “Mighty Mighty,” and “Devotion” helped Open Our Eyes reach platinum status.

After the success of Open Our Eyes, Earth, Wind & Fire was asked to record the soundtrack for a movie titled That’s the Way of the World. The movie is about the music business and record executives. EWF portrayed a fictionalized version of themselves. The band recorded the soundtrack and the album was titled the same as the movie. From this 1975 album, Earth, Wind & Fire’s funky signature hit song, “Shining Star,” was released.

That’s the Way of the World

“Shining Star” became an immediate hit and is Earth, Wind & Fire’s first number one song on the Billboard pop charts. This is another song about the ‘third eye.’ It encourages listeners to search within to find the strength to achieve their hearts’ desires. The song suggests that one must search within himself to find what abilities and talents he may possess. When those qualities are found, he/she can find success and happiness.

He/she can “shine bright.” In other words, he/she can stand out among others. The first verse to the song is as follows:

When you wish upon a star  
Your dreams will take you very far  
But when you wish upon a dream  
Life ain't always what it seems  
What'd you see on a night so clear  
In the sky so very dear\(^\text{29}\)

This verse encourages the listener to wish upon himself or herself. It implies that all people are stars and their dreams can take them very far. This verse also lets listeners know that there will be challenges while working to achieve goals. The chorus states:

You're a shining star  
No matter who you are  
Shining bright to see  
What you could truly be (what you could truly be)\(^\text{30}\)

This chorus sends a powerful message to listeners. It evokes humans’ divine power. It implies that all people are endowed with talents and gifts. There is a Kemetic proverb that states “The kingdom of heaven is within you; and whosoever shall know himself shall find it.” This indicates that Egyptians believed in the divine essence of man. They believed in the concept “Know yourself.”\(^\text{31}\) Teresa Reed writes, “In “Shining Star,” the group sings a message of affirmation.”\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^\text{30}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{32}\) Reed, 145.
After the chorus is sung, the vocalists recite two more verses. The lyrics are as follows:

Shining star come in to view  
Shine its watchful light on you  
Give you strength to carry on  
Make your body big and strong  
Born a man child of the sun  
Saw my work had just begun  
Found I had to stand alone  
Bless it now I've got my own  
So, if you find yourself in need  
Why don't you listen to these words of heed  
Be a giant grain of sand  
Words of wisdom, yes I can  

The watchful light of which the band sings is the sun, which is the closest star to Earth. The sun is also the life force for all living things on this planet. It is the sun that gives energy and strength to organisms. The lyrics also imply that people can stand alone and use the power within themselves: the power that was given to them by nature. The chorus is repeated after another verse. After that, the vocalists chant:

Shining star for you to see  
What your life can truly be  
Shining star for you to see  
What your life can truly be  
Shining star for you to see  
What your life can truly be  

As the vocalists chant, the music fades out. According to Anne-Lise Francois, EWF performs here not only the star’s appearance, but the unveiling of a dominant ideology, a

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34 Ibid.
recognition that what constitutes the norm – the music taken away – is something we could do without. What we hear every day is precisely that which prevents people from realizing what they could truly be.35

“Shining Star” became a smash hit not only because of its dynamic sound, but also because of its uplifting message. At the 2011 Soul Train Awards, actor Malcolm Jamal Warner introduced the tribute for Earth, Wind & Fire. Warner declared that the first time he heard “Shining Star,” he felt he could achieve anything he conceived in his mind. The author felt the same way when he first heard “Shining Star.” The second song released from That’s the Way of the World is “All About Love.”

On “All about Love,” towards the end, Maurice White has a speaking part that lets listeners know that Earth, Wind and Fire was thought-provoking and philosophically profound.

You know, they say there’s beauty in the eyes of the beholder, which I say is a natural fact. Because you are as beautiful as your thoughts, right on. You know, for instance, we study all kinds of occult sciences and astrology and mysticism and world religion, so forth, you dig. And like coming from a hip place, all these things help because if you’re inside your inner self – Have mercy!

Now, there’s an outer self we got to deal with the one that likes to go to parties, one that likes to dress up and be cool and be pretty, all ego trips and all this. I’m trying to tell you, you gotta love you. All love all the beautiful things around you, the trees and the birds. And if there ain’t no beauty, you got to make some beauty.

Have mercy! Listen to me.³⁶

In this monologue, White is implying that one must use his heart and mind (the inner self) as well as his physical body (the outer self) to appreciate beauty and create beauty. In other words, beauty is not only physical, but it is also behavioral. People can see and appreciate the beauty in the natural environment, and they can also create beauty by the way they treat others. Treating others with love and respect is beauty that people are capable of creating. This concept is found in ancient Egyptian cosmology.

The essence of the ancient Egyptian metaphysical beliefs is that man is created to accomplish a specific role, within the grand cosmic scheme. According to Kemetic traditions as explained by Moustafa Gadalla, one cannot succeed in life simply by default. He or she must use his or her metaphysical faculty (mind symbolized by the heart) and his or her physical faculty (action symbolized by the tongue). These actions will be in agreement or disagreement with natural harmony. If during his/her earthly life, the actions are not harmonious with nature, he/she will reincarnate to the earthly realm to try again.³⁷ In other words, if a person does not do the good deeds and serve his/her purpose during his/her life, he/she will be born again into the earth and given another chance to carry out his/her purpose. The second song released as a single from the same album which deals with the inner self is the title track “That’s the Way of the World.”

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“That’s the Way of the World” was written by Maurice White and his younger brother Verdine White. This song also encourages people to focus on the inner self, especially the heart. The chorus reads:

Hearts of fire creates love desire
Take you higher and higher to the world you belong
Hearts of fire creates love desire
Higher and higher to your place on the throne.38

This chorus speaks about fulfilling one’s purpose in life. “The world you belong” and “your place on the throne” are metaphors for living one’s destiny and finding true happiness. One must only follow his or her heart and follow the dreams God has placed inside his or her heart. The heart of a person was very important to the ancient Egyptians. They believed one’s heart is the seat of consciousness and moral sensitivity. It represents the divine presence in humans and it is a source of character and success.39

In Kemetic spirituality, one important aspect in the judgment of a deceased soul is the weighing of the heart. This aspect is depicted in the judgment scene in the Book of Coming Forth by Day.

As Anthony Browder explains, the Book of Coming Forth by Day was a compilation of the texts that were inscribed on the walls of the tombs or papyrus scrolls in Egypt that were buried with the dead. Prayers and litanies played a major role in preparing the soul for its journey through the underworld and guaranteed its safe passage.


to God in the next world. In the judgment scene in the underworld, the heart of the deceased was weighed in on the Grand Scale against the weight of Maat (goddess of justice, truth, and order), symbolized by the ostrich feather she wears in her headband. After reciting the negative confessions of chapter 125 of the Book of Coming Forth by Day, those whose good deeds caused their hearts to “measure up” to the goal of Maat were assured a blessed afterlife. Some of the confessions are as follows:

- I have not stolen
- I have done no murder; I have done no harm
- I have not spoken lies
- I have not caused pain
- I have not committed fornication
- I have not dealt deceitfully
- I have not transgressed

The dead soul must recite all 42 confessions to make sure his/her heart is “light as a feather.” The heart is also discussed in the bridge of the song.

The bridge of the song encourages people to not let their hearts be influenced by the evil deeds of others or the circumstances of their environment.

You will find peace of mind peace of mind
If you look way down in your heart and soul
Don’t hesitate ’cause the world seems cold
Stay young at heart ’cause you’re never old at heart

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40 Browder, 87.
42 Browder, 91.
43 Earth, Wind & Fire, “That’s the Way of the World.”
This bridge encourages people to focus on spiritual things, instead of the physical world around them. Although the body and other things in the physical world may age and get worn out over time, the heart does not. This bridge is suggesting that no matter how old a person may be, if he still has a desire in his heart to accomplish something, he can achieve it. The heart does not grow old and weary, and that is why we must let our hearts guide us through life and not be distracted by the aging physical body. “That’s the Way of the World” has been considered by some Earth, Wind & Fire’s anthem because of its philosophical message. It reached number twelve on the pop charts. The song and the album are both classics. After the phenomenal success of *That’s the Way of the World*, EWF produced another album titled *Gratitude*.

*Gratitude*

*Gratitude* mostly consists of live recordings of previously released songs. It also features newer songs recorded in the studio. One of those is “Sing a Song.” “Sing a Song” is about positivity and was written by Maurice White and Al McKay. It is about the power of speech.

When you feel down and out  
Sing a song, it'll make your day  
Here's a time to shout  
Sing a song, it'll make a way  
Sometimes it's hard to care  
Sing a song, it'll make your day  
A smile so hard to bear  
Sing a song, it'll make a way  
Sing a song

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Sing a song
Sing a song
Sing a song

This song encourages listeners to change their mood by speaking positivity into the atmosphere. According to Congolese Egyptologist Theophile Obenga, speech is the concrete expression of the Creator’s thoughts. This reflects the absolute efficiency of the potency of speech. The Word is creator of discourse and the Pharaonic Egyptians firmly believed in the efficacy of ritual or magical speech. The heart conceives the idea of the universe and the tongue concretely makes the idea real by giving orders.46

Speech is not merely the utterance of words, it is tied to the concept of truth, life, power, and self-mastery. Like other African cultures, as Maulana Karenga posits, Kemetic culture sees the word as power. In Yoruba culture, speech that is spiritually and morally grounded has ‘ase’ – creative power. Ase is the power to bring things into actual existence. Africans place the true basis for the human being’s dominion over his acts and conduct in the power and control of his speech. Therefore, silence becomes a central moral virtue. This is evidenced in Bambara culture in which silence is a cardinal virtue. In African cultures, useless talk is highly disdained. Useless speech is what the Dogon call “speech without path and without seeds.”47 Africans believe the spoken word is part


47 Maulana Karenga, 330-331.
of the life force and the ancient Egyptians, in particular, believed in the concept of creation through the spoken word. They also believed the creator breathed life into mankind. By breathing into man, the creator imparted divine qualities into man. Therefore, man also has the power to speak things into existence.

Janheinz Jahn confirmed the power of the spoken word. He declared that the spoken word affects all change, all production, and generation. For example, sowing alone is not enough to make the maize germinate and grow. Speech and song must be added. It is the word that makes the grasses germinate, the fruits grow, the cows go in calf and give milk. Even handicrafts need the word, if they are to succeed. All the activities of men and all the movement in nature depend on the productive power of the word, which is water, seed, heat, and Nommo, the life force itself. The word frees the ‘frozen’ forces of minerals, brings activity to plants and animals, and guides things to meaningful behavior. 48 Meaningful behavior is what is suggested in “Sing a Song.”

The lyrics to “Sing a Song” encourage listeners to use the power of speech to change their environments and alter their moods when feeling sad. Maurice White, like the ancient Egyptians, believed that humans possess divine power, and he chose to express that in his music. “Sing a Song” topped the charts in January 1976. Another song featured on Gratitude is “Sun Goddess.”

“Sun Goddess” is an instrumental song. It was written by Maurice White and Jon Lind. The song first appeared on Ramsey Lewis’s studio album *Sun Goddess* in 1974. “Sun Goddess” cannot be analyzed lyrically, but it should be noted that the title of the song has a Kemetic reference. There was actually a sun goddess in ancient Egypt named Hathor. As Richard Wilkinson explains, she was a solar sky-goddess and a goddess of the primeval sky-waters. Hathor was closely connected with the sun god Ra whose disk she wears. She was also said to be the wife or daughter of RA.49 The title of this song supports White’s passion for ancient Egypt. Ten months after the release of *Gratitude* (November 1975), Earth, Wind & Fire released another studio album in September 1976 titled *Spirit*.

**Spirit**

*Spirit* was produced to empower the minds of the weary, whose hope and faith were being tested by the burdens of the times. The first song released as a single from this album is “Getaway.” It was written by Bernard Taylor and Peter Cor Belenky, two songwriters who worked with Earth, Wind & Fire. Belenky has composed music for movies and television shows and has songs recorded by Lee Ritenour and Lakeside. Lee Ritenour is a Jazz guitarist who has been performing since 1968. Lakeside is a funk band from Dayton, Ohio, who found commercial success in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Taylor, who passed away in 2014, recorded as a solo artist and composed other

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songs for EWF, including “Lady Sun” and “Spread Your Love.” Peter Cor Belenky spoke about the special meaning of the song, “We were on our own spiritual path and the concept came about as we were basically broke, living in a roach-infested apartment in WATTS! That will make you want to ‘Getaway.’” \( ^{50} \) “Getaway” was released in the summer of 1976 and spent two weeks at #1 on the *Billboard* R&B singles chart. The lyrics to “Getaway” relate to transcendental meditation, practiced and extolled by the members of Earth, Wind & Fire: use the powers of your mind in meditation to get away from the hassles of life, to relax and to find yourself.\(^ {51} \)

According to Verdine White, the band members were into meditation. They were also into healthy food, taking vitamins, and reading philosophical books.\(^ {52} \) Learning about different philosophies is what encouraged Earth, Wind & Fire to produce songs with deep, philosophical messages, such as “Getaway,” which offered Americans, especially African Americans, an escape from chaotic society.

So you say you tried  
But you just can’t find the pleasure  
People around you givin’ you pressure  
Try to resist all the hurt that’s all around you  
If you taste it, it will haunt you

So come, take me by the hand  
We’ll leave this trouble land


I know we can, I know we can, I know we can

Getaway
Let’s leave today.  

In his master’s thesis titled “Funk is its Own Reward: An Analysis of Selected Lyrics in Popular Funk Music of the 1970s,” Travis Lacy claims that these lyrics were revealing in their theme of escapism and implied that the conditions in the 1970s forced African Americans to desire to remove themselves from an oppressive white mainstream society. The escape is not meant to be in the form of an exodus, but by way of the power of the mind by meditation.

Meditation has its origins in civilizations of ancient Africa, Japan, and India. In ancient Egypt, it was traditionally used for calming and regeneration. Basically, a person reaches a balance of the systems of the body and mind. The meditative state enables one to be in the middle of both or at a point of equilibrium and harmony. Meditation involves consciously controlling the rate of breathing, which will in turn decelerate the heartbeat and blood flow. As is the case with sleep, this state of slowness allows the mind and body time to rejuvenate. Many people meditate to relax and even reach a level of inner peace and tranquility. “Getaway” suggests listeners can find peace and tranquility through the power of meditation. The second song from Spirit which speaks positive

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energy into people is “Earth, Wind & Fire,” written by Maurice White and Skip Scarborough.

“Earth, Wind & Fire” alludes to the creation of man and his blessing to dwell on Earth. This song has a special message for people of African descent.

Are you satisfied in, your life and time?
Does it clear your mind, with all the hurt you find?

Built on Mother Earth, they were meant to stay
Nations bloom today, on gifts of yesterday

Born of the Earth, are nature’s children
Fed by the wind, the breath of life
Judged by the fiery hands of God

This song refers to three of the four elements ancient Egyptians believed composed all matter. Egyptians used the four simple phenomena earth, air (wind), fire, and water to describe the functional roles of the four elements necessary to matter. Notice that water is missing from the elements listed in the song. Water is also missing from the title of the band. This song is about the elements in the band’s name. As stated previously, Maurice White purposely omitted water from the title of the band because it is not a part of his astrological sign, Sagittarius. The elements earth, wind, and fire are referenced in the Book of Coming Forth by Day.

There are several significant religious concepts that have emerged from the Book of Coming Forth by Day:

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57 Gadalla, 49.
The concept of creation through the spoken word
Moral concepts of good and evil
God molding man from clay (earth)
God breathing the breath of life into man’s nostrils (wind)
Traditions of hell and hell fire (fire)
The concept of heaven
The soul of man going to heaven
The soul of man sitting on a throne by the side of God
The heavenly blessed eating from the tree of life

When listening to the song, one may think about the creation in the biblical book of Genesis. The truth is that the Book of Coming Forth by Day is older than the book of Genesis. By conservative estimates, the Book of Coming Forth by Day was written about 1,500 years before the first five books of the Bible, including Genesis. The aforementioned concepts are found in the Bible and the Book of Coming Forth by Day. Not only does “Earth, Wind & Fire” consist of religious concepts, but it also contains an empowering message for black people.

The empowering message for black people is that they are nature’s children – the original people. Black people were meant to stay on Earth and live in harmony with nature until the end of time. This song also implies that today’s civilization is thriving because of aspects and ideals taken from ancient civilizations, including ancient Egypt. The people of ancient Egypt (Kemet) were gifted in astronomy, chemistry, architecture, etc. The third Kemetic-themed song on this album is the title track, “Spirit.”

59 Ibid., 92.
“Spirit” was written by Maurice White and Larry Dunn. It is dedicated to Charles Stepney. Stepney was the composer/arranger who was working with Earth, Wind & Fire on *Spirit* when he died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 45. *Spirit* is a song about immortality. It supports the notion that man has a soul and the soul never dies. The ancient Egyptians were among the first people to believe in a soul and the afterlife. There is an ancient Egyptian proverb that states “Body’s sleep becomes the soul’s awakening, and closing of the eyes – true vision, pregnant with good my silence, and the utterance of my word begetting good things.” The soul’s awakening is discussed in the lyrics of “Spirit.”

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We must make our brother see
That the light is he shining on you and me
And the land he gave, roads we must pave
Looking through each other’s eyes
Humanity will arise in love
And our spirits will be at one with thee.
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When the body dies, the soul becomes free and more potent with renewed life. The people of ancient Egypt were among the first humans to express a profound belief in a doctrine of everlasting life. They preserved the bodies of their dead by embalming and entombed the bodies in elaborate inscribed funerary monuments. Prayers and litanies played a major role in preparing the soul of the recently departed for its journey through

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the underworld and guarantee its safe passage to God in the next world. This concept is written in the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*.

The *Book of Coming Forth by Day* was given the title “Book of the Dead” by modern Egyptologists because the several chapters of it have been discovered in sarcophagi wrapped up with the dead. This title is considered highly inappropriate. As Paul Carus explained in *The Monist* the best Kemetic name for it would be “The Coming Forth by Day,” meaning that the soul, in its passage through the underworld, will rise again with renewed life, as the sun, after having set in the West, comes forth again in all its glory in the East. The shining light mentioned in the song is a reference to the renewed life acquired during the resurrection. “Spirit” is rightfully titled because it and the album provide spiritual energy for listeners. Over a year after *Spirit* was released, Earth, Wind & Fire released *All ‘N All* in the fall of 1977.

*All ‘N All*

The central themes for *All ‘N All* were Maurice White’s ongoing interest in many world religions and mythologies: holiness and mysticism, not politics. The first track released from the album is “Serpentine Fire.” This song was written by Maurice White, Verdine White, and Reginald ‘Sonny’ Burke. Burke was a keyboardist/producer who did

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62 Browder, 87.


64 Bailey, 178.
some work with Earth, Wind & Fire. “Serpentine Fire” was a huge hit on the R&B charts, where it remained at #1 for seven weeks. The serpentine fire is described as one’s creative energy – the force that guides a person and makes him/her unique. The deeper explanation comes from Kundalini yoga, where spinal awareness can be achieved by envisioning the boy as a serpent. Secretions in the spine can be stimulated to travel from the sex organs to the brain, creating vitality throughout the body – the serpentine fire.65

When I see your face like the morning sun you spark to shine
Tell all the world my need is fulfilled and that’s a new design
Oh as long as you’re near there is no fear of a victory
But when I’m away influences stray my mind to disagree
Ah wanna see your face in the morning sun ignite my energy
The cause and effect of you has brought new meaning in my life to me

Gonna tell the story morning glory all about the serpentine fire
Gonna tell the story morning glory all about the serpentine fire
Oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah, oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah
I need to see your face in the morning sun ignite my energy
The cause and effect of you has brought new meaning in my life to me
The moment I find when I'm inclined to do my best
Negative wins when I give in then I lose the test, not many times

Gonna tell the story morning glory all about the serpentine fire
Surely as life begun, you will as one, battle with the serpentine fire
Oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah, oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah66

After hearing the song, and even after reading the lyrics, one may still be confused about the song’s meaning. An explanation by one of the songwriters is helpful.

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In order to clarify the meaning, Maurice White gave his own description of the serpentine fire:

“The Kundalini principle has to do with the fluid in the spine. After 29 days, if used properly, it can be converted into a higher choice. It’s called a serpent, because if you tipped the spine out of the body and looked at it, it would look like a serpent – and the fluid is the fire in the spine. Nobody knows what I’m talking about, but a lot of kids go out and look it up and immediately it expands their consciousness.”

White’s primary goal was to raise people’s consciousness. People’s curiosity about “Serpentine Fire” let him know that his lyrics were intriguing. Philip Bailey declared, “Maurice is a student of all kinds of different cultures and spiritual philosophies. All the stuff he’d write about, like ‘Serpentine Fire,’ really separated us from the other bands. It gave us a specialness, an identity, and it raised the level of consciousness and awareness for what we were doing.”

“Serpentine Fire” is a song about yoga. Verdine White is a yoga enthusiast and has a serious aptitude for it. When most people think of yoga, they think of India, but yoga can be traced back to ancient Egypt.

Yoga principles have been discovered in the thirteen surviving chapters of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of essays attributed to the legendary Egyptian master Thoth, who was known as Hermes by the Greeks. Wayne Chandler, author and healer, gives insight about Thoth. He was called Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus by the Greeks.

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67 “Serpentine Fire,” Songfacts.


which means “the thrice great,” “the great great,” “the greatest great,” and THE MASTER of MASTERS.” To Thoth, we may attribute writing, medicine, chemistry, law, rhetoric, the higher aspects of mathematics, astronomy and astrology, and the early Egyptian understanding of the intricate dynamics of universal order. His teachings were written in essays by different unknown authors.

Linda Johnson gives more information about the Corpus Hermeticum. The essays expand on the spiritual contents of hieroglyphic texts painted on Kemetic tomb walls and provide a glimpse into the legacy of Kemetic spiritual wisdom. The Corpus Hermeticum addresses such basic questions as why the universe was created, why human beings were placed here, and how we can return to our spiritual home. All these concepts are found in what is called yoga today.

Some experts believe yoga began in Africa thousands of years ago. As African civilizations migrated to India, the science of yoga was adopted and popularized by the people and became a key component of the Hindu religion. Confusion about the religious aspects stops some people from getting involved with yoga. Krishna Kaur, a Los Angeles Kemetic yoga instructor, states that yoga is not religious and should not conflict with Christian beliefs. She explains, “Yoga is not a religion, it is an art and a science. It is guided by the universal laws of nature.” Kemetic yoga performs

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movements and postures that are depicted on the wall paintings and hieroglyphics found in ancient Egypt.\(^\text{72}\) The Kemetic origin of yoga is supported by Muata Ashby.

Muata Ashby holds a Doctor of Divinity degree from the American Institute of Holistic Theology and a Master’s degree in Liberal Arts and Religious Studies from Thomas Edison State College. He has written several books on African history, religion, and ethics, world mythology, the origins of Yoga in ancient Africa (Kemet/Nubia), and the origins of Christianity in Kemet.\(^\text{73}\) Those books include *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Coming Forth by Day*, *Sacred Sexuality: Ancient Egyptian Tantric Yoga*, and *Egyptian Yoga: The Philosophy of Enlightenment*.

According to Ashby, the ancient Egyptian language and symbols provide the first historical record of Yoga philosophy. The Indian culture of the Indus Valley Dravidians and Harappans appear to have carried it on and expanded much of the intellectual expositions in the ancient spiritual texts of India.\(^\text{74}\) Yoga’s Kemetic origin supports the argument for Earth, Wind & Fire’s use of Kemetic themes in their lyrics. If there is any doubt whether “Serpentine Fire” has a Kemetic theme, Verdine White confirmed that it does. When asked about songs with Kemetic themes, “Serpentine Fire” is the first song he mentioned. He proclaimed, “That’s one that reflects that.” He added, “Serpentine

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Fire obviously has Egyptology. Verdine White also confirmed that “Fantasy” has Kemetic themes.\textsuperscript{75}

“Fantasy” was written by Maurice White, Verdine White, and Eddie del Barrio, a keyboardist/composer who worked with Earth, Wind & Fire. Maurice White found inspiration from the movie \textit{Close Encounters of the Third Kind}. He was caught up in the symbolism and archetypal meanings. The aliens’ implantation of a vision into the Richard Dreyfuss character and the mythic elements of communicating with a deity stirred his imagination. The movie’s acknowledgement of a primal spiritual yearning in all of us resonated deeply with Maurice White. He had been reading about reincarnation and past lives, how we are born into the future through death. All those factors and others led to the gist of the song.\textsuperscript{76} The lyrics:

\begin{verbatim}
Every man has a place, in his heart there's a space
And the world can't erase his fantasies
Take a ride in the sky, on our ship fantasii
All your dreams will come true, right away
And we will live together, until the twelfth of never
Our voices will ring forever, as one
Every thought is a dream, rushing by in a stream
Bringing life to the kingdom of doing
Take a ride in the sky, on our ship fantasii
All your dreams will come true, miles away
Our voices will ring together until the twelfth of never
We all, will live love forever, as one
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{75} Verdine White, Interview with the author. Atlanta, GA, March 16, 2017.

\textsuperscript{76} White, 226.

\textsuperscript{77} Earth, Wind & Fire, “Fantasy,” track no. 2(CD), \textit{All ’N All}, Columbia, 1977.
This first part of the song encourages the listener to focus on the heart and inner man. It informs the listener of just how powerful thoughts are. Thoughts have the power to create action in the physical world. In other words, it is the spiritual realm that governs the physical realm.

The chorus of the song invites listeners to a land called fantasy. The lyrics are as follows:

Come to see victory  
In a land called fantasy  
Loving life, a new degree  
Bring your mind to everlasting liberty

As one, come to see victory  
In a land called fantasy  
Loving life for you and me  
To behold, to your soul is ecstasy

You will find other kind  
That has been in search of you  
Many lives has brought you to  
Recognize, it's your life now in review

And as you stay for the play  
Fantasy has in store for you  
A glowing light will see you through  
It's your day, shining day  
All your dreams come true  
As you glide in your stride  
Wind the wind as you fly away  
Give a smile from your lips and say  
I’m free, yes, I’m free, now I’m on my way

This chorus is about escaping to a place of ecstasy. As in other songs, this song encourages people to use their minds to find a place of contentment to get away from

78 Ibid.
life’s troubles. The extraterrestrial themes in “Fantasy” and contemporary popular music occur within the realm of what cultural critic Mark Dery terms ‘Afro-futurism.’

Afro-futurism refers to African-American signification that appropriates images of advanced technology (fantasii) and alien and or prosthetically enhanced (other kind) features. Afro-futurism is found in a variety of artistic genres, including the science fiction writings of authors such as Steve Barnes, Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, and Charles Sanders. It is also found in films such as John Sayles’s *The Brother from Another Planet* and in the android creations of New York graffiti artist/theoretician Rammellzee.

Afro-futuristic art is usually concerned with black nationalism and empowerment and the creation of mythologies based on the confrontation between historical prophetic imagination, such as ancient Egyptian themes of the afterlife, and modern alienated black existence. As Mark Dery discerns, African-Americans are, in a true sense, the descendants of alien abductees. Similarly, sociologist Paul Gilroy discusses Black diaspora in terms of a history of dispersed peoples, but also of the space that results from this dispersal: a utopian discharge of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics.79 “Fantasy” has the criteria for Afro-futurism. Philip Bailey’s falsetto helps figuratively send the listener to a utopia.

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As Anne-Lise Francois states in *Perspectives of New Music*, for Earth, Wind & Fire, the simulating and literalizing of transcendence through falsetto is the rule and not the exception. Earth, Wind & Fire consciously uses falsetto throughout “Fantasy” to do and reach the heights of which they are singing. With Philip Bailey singing in his signature falsetto, EWF invites you to “take a ride/in a ship called fantasia,” and the song does exactly what it promises. The song takes you for a ride and takes you to the skies. A mixture of unabashed escapism and utopianism, the message is both undercut and confirmed by its extravagant literalism. Bailey’s voice is higher than all the others, sailing over the words. It is clear that his voice is already coming from the ship fantasia.\(^{80}\)

It should be clear that this song is about leaving this world and traveling through the cosmos to experience a better environment and existence. The lyrics make the message plain. It is also about escape. Maurice White explained this in a magazine titled *Melody Maker*:

> The song ‘Fantasy’ is motivated about escapism in the sense of living on a world that is untrue, a world that is unjust, a world that is very selfish and envious, there is a place that everyone can escape to which is their own fantasy. I had to write the song in the sense of sharing this place with people. It’s an escape mechanism.\(^{81}\)

The song mentions the soul being in ecstasy. This concept can be found in several religions.


Christians told Maurice White that if the word fantasy is replaced with heaven, you will understand what the song is about. “Fantasy” is about heaven to Christians. It is about nirvana to Buddhists, and some Muslims believe it is about paradise. These three religious groups believe there is life after death. The concept of the afterlife did not begin with the current major religions of the world. The ancient Egyptians were among the first people to believe in a human soul and that it is immortal. This tenet is presented in the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*.

As mentioned previously, the *Book of Coming Forth by Day* is a compilation of the prayers that were inscribed on the walls of the tombs or papyrus scrolls in ancient Egypt that were buried with the dead. In the book are several concepts dealing with creation, man’s soul, and the afterlife. The concept of eternal happiness (heaven) is what “Fantasy” is about. “Fantasy” and other songs on *All ’N All* are intellectual and inspirational. Another song featured on *All ’N All* is Jupiter. When thinking about songs dealing with Egyptology, Ralph Johnson stated, “The first song that comes to mind is ‘Jupiter.’”

“Jupiter was written by Maurice White, Verdine White, Philip Bailey, and Larry Dunn. Maurice White wrote that “Jupiter” speaks to an ageless, ancient, and transcendental spiritual wisdom. He gave this description for other songs, including

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82 White, 227.

“Serpentine Fire,” “Fantasy,” and “In the Stone.” When listening to “Jupiter,” one may think it is a song about science fiction. It features a character named Jupiter who travels to Earth from a distant planet. When the band performed this song at a concert which the author attended, flying Kemetic pyramids were displayed on the large screen behind the stage. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

Searching in the sky one night, while looking for the moon  
I viewed a mighty light approaching in a zoom  
Need was there to tell someone of my discovery  
Fifteen seconds later, a light appeared in front of me  
To my surprise, there stood a man with age and mystery  
His name was Jupiter and came to visit me  

The name is Jupiter, from the galaxy  
I came to meet you, to make you free  
Deliver to you a flower from  
A distant planet, from where I come  

Keep your eye on Jupiter, such beauty in the sky  
We will wait for your return in the by and by  
Keep your eye on Jupiter, memories we shall fulfill  
Just to view a brighter day, and do a righteous will  

Watching and considering my visual state of mind  
The flower fragrance help reveal to me the sign  
The sigh of love, I had confessed to live and really know  
The sign of love which I had failed my fellowman to show  

The name is Jupiter, from the galaxy  
I came to meet you, to make you free  
Deliver to you a flower from  
A distant planet, from where I come

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84 White, 349.

The Kemetic theme in this song deals with mystery and wisdom. The song speaks of a man with age and mystery. The man coming from a distant place can be a metaphor for acquiring knowledge from a place in the distant past: Egypt. Ancient Egypt has been studied for its advanced knowledge and contributions to civilization. The song speaks of righteousness and love for one’s fellowman. Love and good will are common themes in EWF songs and ancient Egyptian philosophy. If we are to gain knowledge about the mysteries of the universe, it will be helpful to start with the wisdom of ancient Egypt.

In ancient Egypt, centers of learning have been labeled “Mystery Schools.” These schools, and the subjects taught therein, were a mystery only to those unfamiliar with that system of education. The purpose of education in ancient Egypt was to create a society where the citizens would understand the relationship which existed between themselves and the universe. These “Mystery Schools” were the first universities. They were called “Mystery Schools” by foreigners who came there seeking enlightenment.86 “Jupiter” encourages the listener to seek enlightenment by keeping his/her eye on Jupiter who comes from the sky. When listening to this song, one may wonder whether Jupiter has the answer to life’s questions.

Philip Bailey wrote about an encounter he had with a fan inquiring about the song. One day at a hotel in Atlanta, Earth, Wind & Fire encountered a horde of fans. One female fan ran up to Bailey in a seeming panic. She shouted “Jupiter! Jupiter! What is the answer?” To that woman, the song was compelling as if it held the key to the

86 Browder, 124.
secrets of the universe. She was searching for meaning in her own life and believed Bailey could help her.\footnote{Philip Bailey, Shining Star: Braving the Elements of Earth, Wind & Fire (New York: Viking Adult, 2014), 152.} Her reaction is an indication of how EWF’s music affected their listeners.

A year after \textit{All ‘N All} was released, Earth, Wind & Fire released a compilation album. This album was titled \textit{The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. 1}. In addition to previously released hit records, the album included two new tracks: “Got to Get You into My Life” and “September.” After the compilation album was released, EWF returned to the studio to record \textit{I Am}. \textit{I Am} features the hit songs “Boogie Wonderland,” “After the Love Is Gone,” and “In the Stone.”

\textit{I Am}

“In the Stone” was written by Maurice White, Allee Willis, and David Foster. This is a song about finding true love, truth, and strength. Like many Earth, Wind & Fire songs, “In the Stone” is about looking beyond the obvious for a deeper meaning. According to Sheldon Reynolds, a guitarist and vocalist who worked with EWF and became close to Maurice White, the song was about searching for the truth in the past. Reynolds declared, “It was directing us to dig in and learn about our history.” There are a lot of things that have been dug up in the last couple hundred years that are revealing intelligence from us, from our past.”\footnote{Sheldon Reynolds, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, February 11, 2017.} In other words, black people should embrace
ancient Egypt because it reveals their potential to be great. There is scientific evidence to support the claim that the ancient Egyptians were black Africans. If we dig deep and do the research, we can find the truth.

Maurice White called “In the Stone” Earth, Wind & Fire’s mystical anthem because it exemplifies the primary message the band wanted to convey to their listeners: seek love, truth, and strength. The lyrics are as follows:

I found that love provides the key  
Unlocks the heart and souls of you and me  
Love will learn to sing your song  
Love is written in the stone

Every man I meet is walking time  
Free to wander past his conscious mind  
Love will come and take you home  
Love is written in the stone  
Do you believe, my friend, in what you claim  
People of the world all doubt the same  
Bringing questions of their own  
Truth is written in the stone

In the stone, you’ll find the meaning  
You’re not standing tall  
In the stone the light is shining  
Ever touching all

Life experience a passing day  
Time will witness what the ole folks say  
Getting stronger every day  
Strength is written in the stone.  

Teresa Reed declares that “In the Stone” states where real strength, love, and peace reside: “In the Stone you’ll find the meaning … the greatest love … is written in the

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stone,” which, of course, is a metaphor for somewhere deep inside your heart.\textsuperscript{90} The phrase “in the stone” can also be interpreted as a metaphor which refers to the hieroglyphics inscribed in stone on the temples, monuments, tombs, etc., of ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians inscribed literature in stone because it is one of the most durable materials they knew. Egyptian writing contained important messages which needed to last for eternity.

Alan Gardiner explains that in Egypt, the art of writing was always reserved to a conservative and tradition-loving class of scribes, upon whose interests and caprice it depended how far the common speech of the people should be allowed to contaminate the hieroglyphics, which was called the medu neter, ‘the god’s words.’\textsuperscript{91} Theophile Obenga adds more information. He posits that the hieroglyphs themselves were clearly essential and ontological signs endowed with deep meaning, a consistent order of discourse involving nature as human value in the overall movement of existence. To the initiated eye, the hieroglyphics constituted a worldview. They were living beings, essential forms running through all things to make the presence felt.\textsuperscript{92} These writings “in the stone” were believed to hold the answers to questions about the universe at that time. “In the Stone” remains one of Earth, Wind & Fire’s most memorable songs and a favorite among marching bands. This song and several others recorded during EWF’s classic period deal

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Reed, 145.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Alan Gardiner, \textit{Egyptian Grammar} (London: Griffith Institute, 1996), 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Obenga, 315.
\end{itemize}
with metaphysics. After the success of *I Am*, EWF released another studio album in 1980 titled *Faces*. *Faces* contains inspirational songs, but the last song to be analyzed comes from the *Raise* album: “Lady Sun.”

**Raise**

*Raise* was released in 1981. It features the hit singles “Let’s Groove,” “I’ve Had Enough,” and “Wanna Be with You,” which earned a Grammy for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals. Another song featured on the album is “Lady Sun.” “Lady Sun” was not released as a single, but it is a quality track which consists of the distinct Earth, Wind & Fire sound. This song was written by Beloyd Taylor, the songwriter who co-wrote “Getaway.” “Lady Sun” is about adoration for the sun and its significance.

You bring joy to my life  
And I'm so glad that we are together  
You're the one who lifts me up  
You bring sunshine where there's stormy weather  
When I think of you  
I thank you for your love and understanding  
Like a plane you make me fly  
You bring our love to a happy landing

I found out, what love's all about  
There's one thing I want to show you  
I want you to know, you're my lady sun  
You're my reason for living, you light up my day  
You're my lady sun, you're my reason for living  
Don't you go away

Just wanna let you know  
The way we love is very special to me  
And when you touch me
You send a chill uh huh, right through me
You're the one that I can trust deep down inside
I know you won't deceive me
Hope dreams would disappear into the air
If you should ever leave me

On the surface, this song may just appear to be another romantic love song, but it can be interpreted in another way. Lady Sun could actually be the personification of the sun.

As stated previously in this chapter, there is an ancient Egyptian sun goddess named Hathor. There is also a sun god named Ra. The Egyptians were among the first people to personify the sun and make it a deity. Hathor was the sun goddess and Ra was the sun god. This song is about a lady and how important she is to a man’s life. The sun is also important to life on earth. It provides life for all creatures on the planet. The song states that Lady Sun is the man’s reason for being and she lights up the day. This can mean that a woman puts the man in a good mood, and it could also refer to sunlight. In the last stanza, the song mentions trust. A good woman can be trusted. The sun can also be trusted to rise and set every day. “Lady Sun” signifies a love affair between a man and a woman and man’s relationship with the sun, the life force. This song reminds us of the beauty of creation and encourages us to appreciate and live in harmony with nature.

Anthony Browder informs that the sun was one of the most important symbols in the Nile Valley. The people of Kemet not only deified the sun, but they also considered its different aspects: its light, its heat, and its rays. Various deities were designed to represent the physical sun, the intellectual sun, the power of the sun, the sun in the

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heavens, and the sun in its resting place. The awesome force of the sun was recognized as the primary activator for life. When the sun rose on the eastern bank of the Nile, all life began. Birds would sing its praises, man began his work, flowers would blossom, and insects would fly through the air. The sun played an important role in nature.

“Lady Sun” is different from the other songs analyzed. It is the only one that deals with adoration of a cultural deity. The other songs primarily deal with the inner man and metaphysics.

All the songs analyzed contain messages about self-love, spiritual guidance, man’s soul, escape from life’s troubles, and man’s relationship with nature. One of the main themes found in Earth, Wind & Fire’s lyrics is metaphysics, which is searching for the meaning by looking beyond the physical world. These songs contain positive messages and encourage listeners to raise their consciousness.

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94 Browder, 85.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

During the 1970s, Earth, Wind & Fire became one of the most celebrated pop music bands in the world. They stood out from other artists with their unique sound and captivated audiences with their live performances. EWF inspired people with their spiritual messages and they intrigued people with their elaborate album covers and visual art inspired by ancient Egypt. Maurice White created EWF with one vision: to raise the consciousness of people around the world. He took a unique approach and achieved his goal. The music from the band’s classic period helped to establish a strong fan base and that same music has become popular among young listeners. It was during this time that EWF began to produce this legendary music.

During the early 1970s, there was a newfound consciousness among African Americans, and Americans, in general, began to study more Eastern philosophies and new age ideas. Maurice White credits The Laws of Success (1925) by Napoleon Hill with changing him forever. He claimed it altered his mental and spiritual DNA.¹ The Laws of Success is about personal success and self-help. It covers the topics self-confidence, initiative and leadership, imagination, enthusiasm, concentration, cooperation, self-control, and others. Other books influenced White.

Maurice White also read *The Prophet* (1923) by Kahlil Gibran. Gibran was the mystic White had been longing for. Gibran fully embraced Western and Eastern spiritual philosophies and he questioned what organized religion was putting out there.² *The Prophet* is about a prophet named Almustafa who converses with a group of people about the human condition. The book is divided into chapters dealing with love, marriage, children, giving, work, buying and selling, crime and punishment, good and evil, religion, and so forth. Reading this book helped White to grow spiritually. White also read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which encouraged him to spend much time reading and praying while he was on the road.

At the same time Maurice White began reading these books, he discovered astrology, which he believed reveals man to himself. Astrology is the study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies as having influence on human affairs and nature. According to White, many people misunderstood astrology. He believed as long as you do not start worshipping the creation over the Creator, it is a good science to help understand how personalities work together. White claimed it helped him understand his strengths and weaknesses.³ It was through astrology that White created the name “Earth, Wind & Fire.”

When Maurice White started his band, he named it the Salty Peppers. After moving to Los Angeles in 1970, White decided that the band needed a more meaningful name. Maurice White’s zodiac sign is Sagittarius. Sagittarius has a primary elemental

² Maurice White, 65.

³ Ibid. 65.
quality of fire and seasonal qualities of earth and air. White changed air to wind and the band became known as Earth, Wind & Fire. After studying astrology, White also studied ancient Egyptian culture. Yet, he was no scholar on the subject. White’s fascination with ancient Egypt could be seen in the band’s art during their classic period. EWF stood out among many recording artists and they influenced other recording artists.

From 1973 to 1983, EWF was a band by which other musical artists steered their courses. The band was the first to synthesize what Music Magazine called “Black…spirituals with R&B, acid rock, jazz (model and big band) doowop and ethnic rhythms into a high-tech, multi-tracked, cast-of-thousands pop format.” They won six Grammys and landed 30 singles on the pop charts. Those singles were not normal commercial fare. They were, according to the Village Voice, “inordinately brilliant…everything a fan could want: transcendent, had a vision and a mission…(and) [sic] the universe tuned in.”

Earth, Wind & Fire was a prominent influence on other soul/funk bands. EWF influenced the Chocolate Jam Factory, whose material ranged from gritty, aggressive funk to romantic, polished soul. The Chocolate Jam Factory was formed by composer/drummer Leon Chancler. The band produced two albums: The Spread of the Future (1979) and Do I Make You Feel Better? (1980). Both albums were produced by Chancler and he wrote or co-wrote all the material. The albums also gave Chancler an opportunity to do some lead singing, which was unusual for him because he was a

drummer first and foremost. Leon “Ndugu” Chancler was a musician with both jazz and soul credentials in the 1970s and 1980s. On the Chocolate Jam Company’s first album, Chancler employed guitarist Al Mckay of Earth, Wind & Fire. *The Spread of the Future* is an enjoyable album. It consists of gritty, aggressive funk on the singles “Looking Glass” and “A Chocolate Jam.” It features romantic, polished soul on “Just as You Are.” The album is worth searching for if visiting a store that sells old R&B vinyl.⁵ EWF also influenced by EWF is Experience Unlimited.

Experience Unlimited is the original full name of the Washington, D.C. band that later shortened its name to E.U. Before their commercial success in the late 1980s, Experience Unlimited was a more spiritual, jam-oriented band that took their name from Jimi Hendrix’s album *Are You Experienced?* They evolved into a jazzy, funky groove band that took some of their cues from Earth, Wind & Fire. Experience Unlimited released their debut album, *Free Yourself*, in 1977. They later issued the 12-inch single “Knock Him Out Sugar Ray” in 1980. In 1981, they released an album titled *Just the Way You Like it*. As E.U., they went on to score their biggest hit, “Da Butt.”⁶ Earth, Wind & Fire also influenced Free Life.

Free Life was an obscure nine-member soul/funk group produced by Philip Bailey. The group charted with the Epic label single “Wish You Were Here.” The single, written by Bailey, peaked at number 91 on the R&B charts in early 1979. The

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⁶ Ibid., 231.
single and the album, *Free Life*, had Earth, Wind & Fire influences. Another single from the album, “Stomp and Shout” was released but never charted. Group member Carl Carlwell later became a member of another group in the 1990s called 101 North. *Free Life* brought a very EWF-influenced sound to their debut album. That is not surprising considering that the album was co-produced by EWF’s Philip Bailey who also helped with the arranging and wrote or co-wrote several of the songs.\(^7\) The Pockets were also influenced by EWF.

The Pockets were a Baltimore group that scored a top 20 R&B hit in 1977 with “Come Go with Me.” Lead vocalist Al McKinney, Larry Jacobs, Gary Grainer, Charles C. Williams, Kevin Barnes, George Gray, Irving Madison, and Jacob Sheffer composed the lineup. Their debut album *Come Go with Us* was produced by Verdine White of Earth, Wind & Fire and had some impressive selections. The first single released from the album was “Come Go with Me,” which peaked at number 17 on the R&B charts during an 18-week run. On other tracks, there is a close resemblance to EWF: “One Day at a Time” and “Doing it” The former, penned by Verdine White has the classic “Reasons” rhythm and melody, while the latter has an aggressive rhythm track in the flow of “Getaway.” The Pockets recorded two more albums: *Take It on Up* (1978) and *So Delicious* (1979). Overall, the band delivered a nice blend of selections complemented by the good production of White.\(^8\) EWF also influenced the great Stevie Wonder.

\(^7\) Bogdanov, 259.

\(^8\) Ibid., 542.
When speaking at Maurice White’s memorial service, Wonder talked about how he wrote songs that dealt with the problems in society. When he was writing, he wondered whether he was doing the right thing. After listening to Earth, Wind & Fire, he realized he was on the right track. Stevie Wonder released his iconic double album, *Songs in the Key of Life*, in September 1976. EWF also released their classic album, *Spirit*, in September 1976. When writing songs for his iconic album, perhaps Wonder was listening to music by EWF which was released in 1975 or earlier. EWF’s highly successful album *That’s the Way of the World* was released in 1975, as well as *Gratitude*. Both *Spirit* and *Songs in the Key of Life* contain songs which help to deal with the circumstances occurring in America and that time.

This dissertation details the social conditions in America during the period in which Earth, Wind & Fire was formed. This dissertation also explains why Maurice White chose to incorporate Kemetic themes into EWF’s art. Most significantly, this dissertation explores the Kemetic symbols and imagery used in the visual art, and it seeks to explain Kemetic themes found in the lyrics of some of the band’s popular songs. Those themes were spiritual messages to inspire listeners to become better people and to try to make the world a better place.

Maurice White was introduced to spirituality at a young age. Spirituality can be defined as religious devotion or piety. White began singing at the Rose Hill Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, at the age of six. He sang songs along with the congregation. White believed these were songs every black person knew. The songs

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included “Have a Little Talk with Jesus,” “Don’t Let Nobody Turn You Round,” “We’ll Understand It Better By and By,” and “Rock of Ages.” This was the seed of his musical beginnings.\textsuperscript{10} White described Rose Hill as a Pentecostal church in which women screamed and briefly fainted; that behavior scared some of the children. White declared,

> I heard a lot of fire and brimstone from the pulpit, a lot of do this and don’t do that, give yourself to Jesus or God is going to burn you to a crisp forever. This didn’t sit right with me. I had a healthy respect for the Creator, but I never, ever believed in the God of fear. The notion that God favored some and didn’t favor others rang false. I questioned not so much what was right or wrong but what was the way to actually know God.\textsuperscript{11}

White proclaimed, “My Memphis Christian roots, which evolved into my belief in universal truths of all faiths and the wisdom of the stars, have guided my path. But it’s the lessons of my spiritual story that have made me a survivor and kept my head to the sky.”\textsuperscript{12} Maurice White wanted to share his spirituality with all people, not only with Christians. He understood the importance of inclusion. White chose to explore all faiths, especially ancient Egyptian cosmology. This passion for ancient Egypt could be seen among African-Americans during the 1960s.

Earth, Wind & Fire was formed during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. During this time, African-American artists were rejecting traditional Western ideals and they began to incorporate African motifs into their art. Two jazz artists who influenced Maurice White were Phil Cochran and Sun Ra. Sun Ra used Kemetic imagery in his art

\textsuperscript{10} White, 15.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{12} White, 2.
and Phil Cochran introduced White to the Kalimba. White believed that Black people have a natural connection to ancient Egypt. This is displayed in the chorus of “Mighty Mighty.” White’s affection for Egyptology was also inspired by his desire to stimulate Black people and to encourage people of all races to raise their consciousness. He understood the ugliness of racism and he believed he could not ignore it, even as an artist.

As a teenager, Maurice White was beaten by two white police officers. Black males being beaten by white officers was customary in Memphis, Tennessee, at that time. White was delivering newspapers on the white side of Memphis. He was riding his bike when two white cops drove up beside him. The two cops got out of the car and started beating him. White could hear the cops’ laughter fading as they got farther away. The beating haunted him for several months. It shaped his attitude and his understanding of being black in a racist society. White understood that social problems could be healed through music. After working with the Ramsey Lewis Trio, a jazz outfit, for three years (1966-1969), Maurice White decided to form his own band. His vision was to create a band that represented universal truths and to uplift humanity.

Teresa Reed believes Maurice White’s call to preach peace, hope, and love to the world and his effort to attain the same for himself and his group through a global religious consciousness makes a powerful statement about some African Americans in the 1970s. In earlier times, blues preachers lived in a segregated and often hostile America. They shaped their sermons according to the boundaries of their racial identity.

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13 Ibid., 23.
and the cultural specificity of their religious roots.\textsuperscript{14} It was common for the Evangelical preacher to share in the folk style of the blues singer in the 1920s and 1930s. The blues singer created an outspoken satire on these evangelists when he used their stylings to convey his secular message.\textsuperscript{15} With the mainstreaming of African Americans by the 1970s, those cultural boundaries, according to Teresa Reed, broadened to include more than just blacks and more than just Christianity. Earth, Wind & Fire preached sermons in their secular music reflective of this expanded social and religious awareness.\textsuperscript{16} Those sermons were used to help African Americans deal with persistent racism and injustice. Maurice White can be viewed as a preacher who used his art to convey spiritual messages to his audience.

Mark Anthony Neal discusses how America in the 1970s helped shaped the messages black musicians delivered. Black communities in the early 1970s were defined by random violence, a heightened (police and national guard) presence, and a general decline in the safety and stability of their public institutions. Those communities include Augusta, Georgia (1970), Chattanooga, Tennessee (1971), and Boston, Massachusetts (1972). With the subsequent demise of accessible social spaces, which help to define and shape the black music tradition, many artists attempted to aurally reconstruct these social spaces through live recordings. Approaching the contemporary example of the black

\textsuperscript{14} Teresa Reed, \textit{The Holy Profane} (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 146.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{16} Reed, 146.
church experience and chronicled examples of black communal exchange, the live recordings highlighted the call and response practices embedded in black culture.\textsuperscript{17}

Prime examples of live recordings are the WattStax recordings. The first recording took place at the WattStax Project of 1972. A second festival was recorded in 1973 under the banner of WattStax II.

The WattStax recordings were organized by the Stax/Volt record label. Stax/Volt could boast that its black-owned status was not earned by cultivating a mainstream audience at the expense of the core constituency it claimed to represent. The Watts community of Los Angeles, California had been etched in the minds of Americans since violent upheavals in the summer of 1965. Stax/Volt’s relationship with the community underscored the need for responsible corporate intervention with inner cities. Mark Anthony Neal claims the WattStax recordings presented black music in an organic context that highlighted massive audience interaction with the music and artists.\textsuperscript{18}

Perhaps, these outdoor concerts gave Earth, Wind & Fire and other funk artists inspiration for their elaborate live performances. It was also during the 1970s when African Americans displayed tremendous racial pride, which started in the late 1960s.

Rickey Vincent argues that in the early 1970s, the complete humanity of black people was being realized. The revolution in black America had as much to do with identity as it did with one’s political or social status. African-Americans began to break

\textsuperscript{17} Mark Anthony Neal, \textit{What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1999), 56.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 87-88.
away from the crushing yoke of white acceptance, and move toward true self-
determination. “Black is Beautiful” was the true theme, as the demeaning language of European culture was being dissolved. In the West, blackness and darkness had long been associated with evil. Terms like “black magic,” “blackmail,” and “black sheep” have been used since the “Dark Ages.” Even the offensive terms *funk* and *funky* were being reclaimed as something worthwhile, if only because – or especially because – of their centrality to the black experience.\(^1\)

It was also during the early 1970s when Blaxploitation films were first produced. Blaxploitation films were originally made for an urban black audience, but the audience appeal soon broadened across racial lines. These films were the first to regularly feature soundtracks with funk and soul music and primarily black casts. These films include *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (1971), for which Earth, Wind & Fire performed the soundtrack, *Shaft* (1971), *Superfly* (1972), *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), and *Foxy Brown* (1974). African Americans became more popular on television. In 1972, *Sanford & Son*, the first sitcom with an all-black cast was produced. Other black sitcoms followed, such as *Good Times* (1974), *The Jeffersons* (1975) and *What’s Happening!!* (1976). During this time, African Americans were studying their African heritage. Black Studies was becoming a popular academic discipline.

After the first Black Studies program was created at San Francisco State in 1968, other colleges and universities followed suit. Berkeley College (1970), Morehouse

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College (1971), and Virginia Commonwealth University (1972) are just three examples. African Americans realized they have a great African heritage. One reason Maurice White decided to use Kemetic imagery in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art is to remind Black people of their glorious past. Kemet (ancient Egypt) was one of the greatest civilizations known to man, and it was created by black Africans. White also wanted people to be intrigued and explore Kemetic spirituality (in addition to others). He also wanted people to understand that all races are connected and have a common origin: Africa.

Earth, Wind & Fire not only used ancient Egyptian symbols, but they employed symbols from various cultures. Those various symbols can be seen in the Let Me Talk video and the inside sleeve for All ’N All. Both the video and the album feature Kemetic symbols: the ankh and the eye of Herus and other religious symbols, such as the Christian cross, the Jewish Star of David, Shiva – god of the Hindus, the Buddha, and the Jupiter symbol. As mentioned previously, this dissertation examines Kemetic themes. That includes Kemetic symbols and lyrical messages dealing with Kemetic ideology. Maurice White’s purpose for using the various symbols was to raise people’s consciousness or level of spirituality. He wanted people to become more spiritual, no matter what path they might take. White encouraged people to seek the one true God, whether it is through Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Kemetic spirituality. People often assumed that Maurice White was only into Kemetic spirituality because Kemetic symbols were most visible in Earth, Wind & Fire’s artwork.
The Kemetic symbols displayed in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art represent the ideals the band wanted to propagate to their listeners. The symbols represent man’s connection to the Supreme God, man’s divine nature, and his quest for enlightenment. These symbols include deities, monuments, and those which signify life, resurrection, wisdom, worship, and protection. The pyramid is the first Kemetic symbol used by Earth, Wind and Fire and probably the most familiar. Pyramids appeared on the cover of five EWF albums and were displayed in three music videos. Pyramids were also used in concerts. The pyramids signified different concepts. In the concerts, the pyramids represented spaceships and vehicles for transcending time. In the videos, the pyramids signify advanced knowledge in sciences, such as mathematics, physics, and astronomy. On the album covers, the pyramids symbolized gateways to the spiritual realm, cooperative achievement, and wisdom for ancient and modern times. In addition to pyramids, EWF displayed Kemetic deities in their visual art.

The most prominent Kemetic deity displayed in Earth, Wind & Fire’s visual art is Heru. He is the supreme god above others and represents eternal protection. Heru has also been displayed in a smaller form: the eye of Heru, which represents universal harmony and eternal life. Universal harmony is a concept found in several EWF songs, such as “Devotion” and “All About Love.” Other deities displayed are Auset, Nebthet, Nekbet, and Anubis. Anubis is the ram-headed god who is seen as a criosphinx in the “Fall in Love with Me” video. His primary purpose was to prepare mummies for the afterlife. The other deities are represented in female form. Therefore, they are called goddesses.
The most powerful goddess in Kemetic mythology is Auset (Isis). She had the power to speak life and death. Maurice White believed each individual, to an extent, has the power to embrace life or death. White wanted people to choose life. This is why the band gave positive messages in their music. Auset’s twin sister was Nebthet. She was the protector of the dead. Maurice White understood the notion that the soul lives forever and he believed one’s eternal journey is determined by how one lives on earth. Another important goddess was Nekbet. She was the guardian of the temple and keeper of wisdom. Wisdom was also signified in other symbols.

The female figure on the cover of *Raise* represents wisdom of the ages and raising one’s consciousness. The Great Sphinx displayed in the “Fall in Love with Me” video also represents wisdom, as well as strength. Strength is also symbolized by the noble statues in the same video. The statues represent a pharaoh and his queen. It was the pharaoh and his queen who held complete power over the people. Another symbol that represents power is the royal cartouche of Tutankhamun. This cartouche displays the many noble titles and epithets of this great ruler. Maurice White believed each individual has the power to be great and successful. This is what the band sang about in “Shining Star” and “Be Ever Wonderful.” Other symbols represent life and protection.

The ankh represents life eternal and resurrection and the scarab represents resurrection and the immortality of the sun god, Ra. Life is also signified by the sarcophagus. Although the sarcophagus was used to protect the corpse, it was also the place where new life emerged. While the sarcophagus protected the body, the death mask was used to protect the spirit. King Tut’s death mask is one of the most exquisite
ever discovered. It has become the physical representation of his name. The mask was used to ensure the king’s pathway to Heaven. Other symbols used for man’s pathway to Heaven are the temple columns.

Columns are displayed on the *I Am* cover and in the “Fall in Love with Me” video. These columns served as pillars which held up Heaven above the worshippers.

Maurice White was a spiritual man who understood the need for man’s connection to God and the spiritual realm. This is exemplified by the display of the Abu Simbel Great Temple on the *All ‘N All* cover and the “Serpentine Fire” video. All the Kemetic symbols used by Earth, Wind & Fire signify the band’s aim to encourage people to seek ways to become better individuals so that we may live in a better world. Symbols are not exclusive to Kemetic spirituality.

Symbols are found in many religions, including Christianity. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is represented by a dove. Jesus is called the Lamb of God and represented by that animal. Ancient Greeks believed that the flesh of peacocks didn’t decompose after death and peacocks became a symbol of immortality. Early Christians adopted the symbol to represent eternal life. Medieval Europeans believed that pelicans were overly attentive to their young, even to the point of wounding themselves and letting the young drink their blood when no food was available. As a result, the pelican became a symbol of Jesus’s passion and the pouring of his blood for the forgiveness of sins. These animals represent particular concepts, just like the deities in ancient Egypt are

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represented by animals. When one knows the similarities Kemetic spirituality has with the major world religions, Kemetic spirituality and its symbols do not appear so strange.

The Kemetic symbols used in the visual art of Earth, Wind & Fire represent ideal concepts, such as life eternal, wisdom, protection, and justice. These concepts are found in other world religions, especially Christianity, which is the most ubiquitous religion of the western world. By employing Kemetic symbols, Maurice White encouraged people, including those in the western world, to seek different paths to happiness, not excluding Christianity. White’s mission was to lead people to the one Supreme God.

The Kemetic gods and goddesses represent attributes of the Supreme God. A Kemetic proverb states “There is only one SUPREME BEING, ALL is IT; IT manifests itself in infinite forms and many gods.” This proverb is explained by Anthony Browder. In his book *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization*, Browder confirms, “From the beginning of time, Africans have always had a belief in one God, self-created and omnipotent. Upon observing the wonders of the earth and the sky, man began to see the many manifestations of the one Creator reflected in all that exists. These manifestations were identified as aspects of the One, or Netcher. This monotheistic viewpoint saw everything as part of the whole. A netcher is not God; it is an integral part of that which is God. This notion of one Supreme God is supported by Moustafa Gadalla.

In *Egyptian Cosmology: The Animated Universe*, Gadalla explains, “The Egyptians believed in one God who was self-produced, self-existent, immortal, invisible, eternal, almighty, omniscient, etc. The one God was never represented. It is the functions and attributes of his domain that were represented. These attributes were called
the neteru. The masculine singular for the term is neter and the feminine singular is netert. One could only define God by the multitude of his attributes, powers, and actions.  

With knowledge of the Netcher and neteru, one can have a better understanding of Kemetic spirituality and Earth, Wind & Fire’s reasoning for using images of Kemetic deities. Earth, Wind & Fire used Kemetic deities and other symbols to offer enlightenment. Those symbols have nothing to do with promoting evil; they represent the benign qualities of the one Supreme God. By using Kemetic symbols, Maurice wanted his audience to be encouraged to inquire about the symbols and eventually study the concepts they signify: wisdom, justice, truth, eternal life, strength, protection, and faith. EWF decided to use the pyramid in their concerts, beginning with the All ’N All tour.

During the All ’N All tour, magician Doug Henning constructed an illusion in which hooded aliens with masks gradually joined the Earth, Wind & Fire members on stage. The band members entered a metallic pyramid one by one, leaving the aliens onstage. The pyramid took off skyward and exploded. To the audience’s amazement, the band members revealed themselves as the hooded aliens, as if they had been somehow transported from the exploding pyramid to the stage. According to Wayne Vaughn, musician and close friend of Maurice White who worked with EWF, the band

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22 White, 235.
was more or less going into the mystic, the illusion. It was representing the fact that man, probably back in the pyramid days, had more mystical powers. People still can’t make a pyramid like the ones at Giza, Egypt, today. White was trying to bring in a little curiosity. The magic acts used in the concerts were expensive, but Maurice wanted the best money could get.

Maurice White declared that he created Earth, Wind & Fire to uplift humanity, but surely, he also created the band to earn good money and make a decent living. Being a musician had been his occupation for years. High money enabled White to have the kind of shows he wanted to intrigue his audiences. The money also enabled him to have the finest album covers and unique music videos. By earning a lot of money, Maurice White had the ability to influence his audiences and uplift humanity. White took the band members to Egypt in 1979. Some of the members were just as excited about Egypt as White was. Some of them were not. Maurice White was about 10 years older than the other band members, and he played the role of big brother to all of them. The other band members basically followed White’s lead. The band produced songs with Ancient Egyptian themes during their period.

The classic period for Earth, Wind & Fire began in 1973. In that year, the band recorded Head to the Sky, which features the hit single “Keep Your Head to the Sky.” “Keep Your Head to the Sky” is about faith in yourself and believing that something good can and will happen. The song encourages listeners to believe that a bad situation can turn around. Their next studio album, Open Our Eyes, features the hit singles

“Mighty Mighty” and “Open Our Eyes.” “Mighty Mighty is about racial pride for black people, based on the notion that ancient Egypt was a black African nation. “Open Our Eyes” is a hymn asking God to open our eyes – our third eyes. The third eye is an extension of what the mind knowingly perceives. Some may refer to it as a “sixth sense.” Another song which deals with the third eye is “Shining Star.”

“Shining Star” is featured on That’s the Way of the World. This song deals with the inner man by encouraging him to find the strength within. Another song from this album is “All About Love.” “All About Love” encourages people to appreciate their outward and inner beauty. And the title track, “That’s the Way of the World,” focuses on the heart and searching for answers by looking beneath the surface. The band continued to record songs with uplifting messages on other albums. “Sing a Song” reminds listeners of the power of the spoken word. It encourages listeners to make a bad mood or situation better by singing a positive song. “Getaway” is a song about escaping through meditation. “Earth, Wind & Fire” is about God’s creation of man. “Spirit” deals with the human soul and the afterlife. “Serpentine Fire” discusses the sexual energy of yoga. “Fantasy” is another song about the afterlife and escape. “In the Stone” suggests that one should look beneath the surface to find truth, love, and strength. “In the Stone” also encourages us to look to the ancient past for enlightenment, and “Lady Sun” is about man’s relationship with the sun and the personification and deification of the sun.

Maurice White wanted the band to record inspirational songs to raise the consciousness of their listeners.
Earth, Wind & Fire’s message is positive. It is also intimate because the band has never been afraid to give and display all their energy. As they grew, musically and spiritually, we were inclined to listen because their virtuoso musicianship makes it so easy. EWF cultivated rhythms that are the heartbeat of humanity. The instruments were mastered by each member. The will of each musician, operating within the framework of EWF’s ultimate destiny, evolves into a greater will. That will is to spread the message of love, devotion, reason, and thought to all of us. Work and dedication for and to the natural order of things has made EWF what they are, and listening to their music has hopefully influenced each of us to realize the potential within ourselves.24

Some of Earth, Wind & Fire’s listeners expressed how the band has affected them via Facebook. The author asked fans if they were impressed by EWF’s music only or also by the lyrics and visual art. Fifty-five people responded. Twenty-seven people wrote that they were intrigued by all three constructs. Seventeen people wrote that they were impressed with both the music and lyrics. Four people expressed their affection for the lyrics and three people expressed their affection for the music. The other people simply wrote compliments about the band. Charles Freeman, owner at Mariposa Entertainment Group who lives in Los Angeles, wrote that he first saw EWF in concert in 1971. He has been hooked on their music, lyrics, philosophy, positive messages, and vibes ever since. Cyndi Dewberry of Dayton, Ohio, wrote that the lyrical content was very inspiring, encouraging, thought provoking, and uplifting. EWF’s music helped her

through quite a few personal situations in her life. Jeff Short from Boston, Massachusetts, also wrote that he clung to EWF during some down periods in his life. Ezzard McCall of Akron, Ohio, wrote that EWF simply affected the mind, body, and soul positively. Rita Page Thompson of Ann Arbor, Michigan, wrote that she was inspired by the lyrics, musical creativity, visuals, positivity, and consciousness raising. Some of the fans wrote about particular songs.

Ianthia Martin Joseph expressed her opinion about “Keep Your Head to the Sky.” She wrote that the song just made her feel some kind of way inside, like she could do whatever she set out to accomplish. The sky was the limit. Sal Reyna from Pacoima, California, also wrote about “Keep Your Head to the Sky.” He wrote that he got hooked from one line: “Master told me one day.” Reyna wrote, I always wanted to know who Master was, how did Master come to speak to him (Philip Bailey) and why was Master speaking to him. I wanted this Master to speak to me too. So, I went on a life’s journey to find Master. And sure enough, after finding him, “Master told me one day.” Johnny Mahone of Coldwater, Michigan, wrote that after he heard “Burning Bush” for the first time, “I said to myself this is my favorite band. I’ve been on a natural high with EW&F ever since. They been trying to tell us something for years if you just listen!” Gale Gale of Hampton, Virginia, wrote, “It was the lyrics for me (then the music). Back then I had actually sat down and listened to “See the Light” and that song stuck in my head because

for years I always heard my grandmothers talk about the Lord saying “Well Done” which I never understood it until I read it.” For years, she would tell people that EWF had more songs than “Reasons” and that there is a message we need to understand and “Yearnin and Learnin” is what we need to do.\textsuperscript{26} Other fans wrote about the knowledge EWF conveyed.

The author asked fans whether Earth, Wind & Fire was responsible for raising the consciousness of listeners concerning Egyptology. All 19 respondents gave a positive response. Beau Shelby of Indianola, Mississippi, wrote “Looking at the imagery every single day as I went through my collection was a constant reminder of questions that would arise, the fact that I had some homework to do if I dare pursue it.” Donnell Robinson of Cleveland, Ohio, wrote “Absolutely 360 degrees of knowledge coming from them! As a teen, I listened to every word! And understood everything they were conveying! The Spirit album comes to mind! Really all their songs would take me to another place and time!” Thomasine McAllister of the Bronx, New York, wrote, “I had studied Egypt as a child. I was always fascinated with the pyramids. Maurice and Earth, Wind & Fire definitely made me want to delve into it a little bit more.” Ezzard McCall gave another response. He wrote, “EWF, teaching without preaching about our history, which is still visible and still standing all over the world, not only in Egypt. The

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
greatness about us comes from the greatness in us. Of the seven wonders of the world, only one -- the Great Pyramid of Giza remains relatively intact.’’

After asking fans which aspect of the Earth, Wind & Fire’s art was most influential, 55 people responded on the fan page. When the data is analyzed, 48 people wrote that they were impressed with the lyrics. That is a little more than 87 percent. Thirty people wrote that they were impressed by the music. That is just above 54 percent. Twenty-seven expressed their love for the visual art. That equates to 49 percent.

According to data scientist Christopher Peters, these numbers provide a ratio for a broader spectrum. In other words, these numbers provide an estimate of how most Earth, Wind & Fire fans feel. A little more than half are fans mainly because of the band’s dynamic sound. An overwhelming majority are intrigued by the lyrics and almost half of the fans are fascinated with the visual art. After asking fans whether Earth, Wind & Fire raised their consciousness concerning Egyptology, only 19 people responded. This number is smaller than expected. It is safe to assume that a small minority of EWF fans took the Kemetic themes seriously enough to actively study them. Based upon questioning a small group of people, it can be argued that the Kemetic themes in EWF’s art impacted a significant number of people.

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There are Earth, Wind & Fire fans who never attended a concert. There are fans who never bought an album and may have never examined the album covers. There may also be fans who never closely watched their videos. Some people are fascinated with EWF just because their music sounds good. Many people have never paid close attention to the lyrics. This is the case for many recording artists. It would be safe to assume that EWF may not have raised the consciousness of the majority of their listeners. It is also safe to assume they raised the consciousness of a significant amount of people. Even if a small minority of listeners’ consciousness were raised, the mission of Maurice White and Earth, Wind & Fire was accomplished. No matter how listeners were affected, Earth, Wind & Fire became world renowned during their classic period and that period solidified their place in musical history. EWF produced music that made people feel good. That was a vision of Maurice White.

Maurice White wanted his audience to be able to enjoy life. He was actually a funny guy. Morris Pleasure stated, “You could not even be in that band if you did not have a sense of humor.”²⁹ Maurice White wanted audiences to take a higher path. He wanted them to reach the divine, and they did because according to music and culture writer Ericka Blount Danois, reaching the divine requires transcending time.³⁰ White encouraged audiences to transcend time by using pyramids as space ships in concerts. He encouraged fans to elevate their minds by employing ancient Egyptian imagery in the visual art. And he encouraged listeners to transcend space by fantasizing (“Fantasy”) and


³⁰ Ericka Blount Danois, “Cosmic Heights,” Wax Poetics (July/August 2011), 82.
meditating ("Getaway"). Although many listeners have expressed how EWF challenged them to raise their consciousness, there are listeners who simply enjoyed the sound of their music. Some prominent EWF listeners have expressed their feelings about the band.

Entertainment mogul Steve Harvey wrote that no other artists put lyrics to a melody like Earth, Wind & Fire did. No one put harmony to sound and rhythm like they did. No one added horns in the way they did, and no one messed with our minds about love and life like they did. EWF remained thoroughly committed to soul, yet they had a universal sound – and appeal. Hands down, EWF is the greatest group of all time.31 David Foster, the songwriter and composer who worked with Earth, Wind & Fire, wrote that Maurice White was a catalyst. Through his creation of EWF, he changed the musical and performance landscape of pop music forever. At a television special for PBS, Foster stated, “One thing I know for sure, if he hadn’t been born, pop music would sound a lot different today.”32 Other musicians have also described EWF’s music and its power.

Herb Powell, the musician who helped write Maurice White’s autobiography, wrote that after he went to his first Earth, Wind & Fire concert, he was never the same. According to Powell, White always had that preacher thing going, whipping up the crowd “to get an Almighty groove growing. He describes “Devotion,” “Open Our Eyes,” “Burning Bush,” and “Keep Your Head to the Sky” as secular hymns. Powell describes

31 White, x.

32 Ibid., xi-xii.
the majority of EWF’s songs as expressing universal truths, affirmations of optimism and spiritual wisdoms, and repudiations of the party life. Another musician, Morris Pleasure, explained how EWF’s music influenced him.

Morris Pleasure is a keyboardist who was a member of Earth, Wind & Fire from 1993 until 2001. He declared that Egyptian themes simply became a part of the EWF brand. The whole thing was about a universal love, and that was it. That was enough. So, it’s obvious that what they were trying to say is “all religions, all people, all spiritualities, all faiths, you know….we’re all connected. Music connects us.” Pleasure also spoke about being a young fan of EWF back in the 1970s. He claims that the artwork drew his attention and he became fascinated with the pyramids and the EWF concerts made him curious. While some people were claiming that EWF worshipped the sun, Pleasure understood that the band was coming from a place of love. And they have been loved the world over.

Earth, Wind & Fire has played before presidents, kings, queens, prime ministers, and Olympic medalists around the world. They performed at government functions for both Democrat and Republican parties, and appeared at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah. When Al Gore was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, EWF performed at a special reception for the attendees in Oslo, Norway. When Barack Hussein Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States in 2008, EWF was chosen to perform at the

33 Ibid., 359.

Governor’s Ball on February 22, 2009. The bottom line is Earth, Wind & Fire makes you feel good, as music should. Their longevity has to do with the strength of their songbook and body of work. Their music has become a part of the weave of the creative fabric of American society, as well as the worldwide music continuum.35

Earth, Wind & Fire’s music appeals to people from various races and demographics. One EWF listener named Lawrence Brooks told the author, “An Earth, Wind & Fire concert is more integrated than any church service I have attended.” The author can attest to that; He attended an EWF concert on March 15, 2017, at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The concert was attended by various races of people from different age groups. Most attendees were dancing to the music and enjoying the concert. It seemed as if everyone was part of one large family. Prior to the concert, the author was still feeling a little gloom because of the death of Maurice White. After listening to a few songs and viewing the Kemetic images and images of Maurice White on the large screen behind the stage, those negative feelings passed away. The author felt as if he could travel through time and relive moments from the past. When the band began performing “Jupiter,” images of flying pyramids were displayed on the screen. This reminded the author of the greatness of Kemet. When seeing the images of Maurice, it seemed as if he was still alive because the wonderful music he produced is still with us. It was definitely a spiritual experience.

Earth, Wind & Fire’s music became popular in secular spaces among religious-minded people. EWF’s spiritual messages appealed to all people because they avoided iconic religious figures, such as Jesus, Mohammad, and Moses. The spiritual truths EWF sang about could be found in various religions. Although Maurice White encouraged people to seek different spiritual paths, he did not forget about his own Baptist upbringing. Herb Powell stated that he and White often talked about Christ consciousness during many of their late-night conversations. Sheldon Reynolds declared that in the last conversation he had with Maurice White, White told him “Always keep Jesus with you.” Evidently, Maurice White did not reject Christianity. Some Christian ideals are found in some of the band’s songs. This research proves that Maurice White’s reason for using Kemetic symbols has nothing to do with witchcraft. He used those symbols to encourage people to seek a different path to the one true God. White’s gimmick helped EWF become legendary.

Earth, Wind & Fire has been covered and sampled by numerous artists. “That’s the Way of the World” was covered by R&B artist Norman Connors on his Passion (1988) album. “Fantasy” was covered by Italian house music band Black Box for their Dreamland (1990) album. “In the Stone” was covered by soul diva Dionne Warwick for her Hot! Live & Otherwise (1986) album. For their 1999 hit “Jamboree,” Hip Hop group, Naughty by Nature, sampled “On Your Face.” “Devotion is sampled on female Hip Hop

36 White, 358.

artist Yo-Yo’s 1991 hit “You Can’t Play with My Yo-Yo.” Grammy Award-winning Hip Hop group, Arrested Development, sampled “Sunshine” for their 1992 hit “Natural.” All these artists’ covers and samples are an indication of how influential EWF has become in the music industry and popular culture.

Although Maurice White is deceased, the band still tours and records. EWF is the only self-contained band from the 1970s that tours and records new material. EWF recorded an album in 2013 titled *Now, Then & Forever*. They recorded a Christmas album in 2014 titled *Holiday*. The band’s latest tour occurred in 2017. EWF is still going strong after more than forty years in the music business. Maurice White created the band to be unique among others. The band’s art captivated and intrigued many but drew criticism from others. The author’s purpose for writing this dissertation is to prove the criticism EWF received has no justification.

Earth, Wind & Fire was criticized for their use of Kemetic symbols which related to Kemetic spirituality and philosophy. Some people have criticized doctrines outside of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as being pagan and evil. The truth is there are many similarities in the various world religions, and many Christian tenets are found in other religions, including ancient Egyptian spirituality. Some of the concepts found in the Christian Bible can also be found in the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*, which was written about 1,500 years before the first books of the Bible. The criticism Earth, Wind

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39 Ibid., 82.
& Fire has received about their use of Kemetic themes is obviously based upon ignorance. It is problematic for Christians to celebrate the tenets of the Bible without understanding that some of those same tenets were developed in ancient Egypt. Many Kemetic symbols can be found in American culture.

The Washington Monument is in the shape of an ancient Egyptian obelisk. There is a pyramid-shaped building in Memphis, Tennessee, that was originally built as an arena. A pyramid is displayed on the American one-dollar bill. Pyramids that were built in Egypt and in other locations during ancient times were a common building technique. The people wanted to build large and high structures. So, they built inward and upward from the base. People began to build large buildings straight up when they developed new building techniques and materials, such as steel. The large pyramids of ancient Egypt can be described as “ancient skyscrapers.” Their shape has nothing to do with evil. A single eye is also displayed on the one-dollar bill.

The eye on the American one-dollar bill is reminiscent of the Kemetic third eye or eye of Heru. It is safe to assume that most Americans have used one-dollar bills for transactions, including the Christians who have criticized Earth, Wind & Fire. And it is highly doubtful they will stop using one-dollar bills if they are aware of its features. There is nothing problematic about the Kemetic symbols used by EWF and those used in American culture. Lack of knowledge about the symbols is the problem, not the actual symbols.

The truth remains that ancient Egypt contributed greatly to world civilization. Ancient Egypt gave the world advancements in philosophy, astronomy, and religion.
Maurice White studied Egyptology because he understood how influential Kemetic culture was, even its cosmology and religion. White’s use of Kemetic themes helped raise the consciousness of Earth, Wind & Fire listeners. It also helped people to appreciate a spiritual doctrine with which they may not have been familiar. When studying the Kemetic themes of Earth, Wind & Fire, one can deduce that the criticism which implies that EWF promoted evil is unjustifiable. This research provides a foundation for those who wish to study African art, Eastern philosophies, and Kemetic culture, in general. EWF’s art from their classic period is still celebrated today. It has been stated that the purpose of life is not to live forever but to create something that will. Maurice White did exactly that when he created Earth, Wind & Fire.
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