



THE SINGING JUSTICE
COLLECTIVE

Black Song



*A MANIFESTO
FOR MUSIC
AND JUSTICE*

BLACK SONG

MUSIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Black Song

A Manifesto for Music and Justice

The Singing Justice Collective

Naomi André, Stephen Berrey, Tyrese Byrd, Mark Clague,
Christie Finn, Thomas Hampson, Caroline Helton,
Cody Ebright-Jones, Traci Lombré, Louise Toppin, and
Samantha Rose Williams

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Foreword

Artists are here to disturb the peace. They have to disturb the peace. Otherwise, chaos.

—James Baldwin¹

Sing me your folk songs, and I'll tell you about the character, customs, and history of your people.

—Paul Robeson²

In a world where music often serves as a backdrop to our lives, *Black Song: A Manifesto for Music and Justice* powerfully reminds us of the deep, transformative potential that lies within the melodies, rhythms, and lyrics created by Black artists. This book is more than a collection of essays; it is a clarion call, a manifesto, that centers Black music not only as an art form but as a vital force for social change.

The eleven authors contributing to this volume come from diverse artistic and academic disciplines, each bringing a unique perspective to the complex interplay between music, identity, and activism. Their collective voice echoes the rich tapestry of Black music, which has long been a conduit for expression, resistance, and the articulation of lived experiences in the face of oppression. From the spirituals that emerged from the crucible of slavery to the anthems of the civil rights movement, from hip-hop's incisive critiques of power to the genre-defying innovations of contemporary Black artists, this book traces the unbroken line of expression, creativity, and resistance that runs through the heart of Black music.

As I write this foreword, I am deeply aware of the privilege and responsibility of contributing to such a vital project. The significance of this work extends beyond the pages of a book or even the years of performances enlightening the theses herein; it is a testament to the enduring power of *Black Song* as a tool for social justice, a reminder that the struggle for equality and human dignity has always had a soundtrack.

Plato's general views on music in *The Republic* and *The Laws* can be summarized as "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind,

flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything.” This sentiment encapsulates the transformative power of music and creativity, underscoring their essential role in shaping not just individual lives but the very fabric of society.

However, in the context of American culture, one must grapple with a profound and unsettling question: is the relegation of the vast and vibrant creativity of African Americans to a kind of parallel universe, separate from a centered, privileged, white American culture, not a moral issue that demands the attention of all Americans?

The true miracle of America lies not merely in our historical achievements but in our relentless pursuit of self-inquiry and transformation. This nation’s greatness is not measured solely by its accomplishments but by its unwavering commitment to asking difficult questions and engaging in the ongoing search for truth. Our most enduring contribution to civilization may well be our dedication to redefining ourselves as human beings—embracing and celebrating the diversity of cultures that make up the rich tapestry of American life. This celebration of diversity, in all its forms, is what truly should set us apart, and it is this commitment that must continue to guide us as we strive toward a more just and inclusive society. (*E Pluribus Unum* indeed!)

Black Song is a manifesto in the truest sense—an assertion of principles and a call to action. It challenges us to listen more deeply and to recognize how Black music has shaped and continues to shape America’s social and political landscapes. It also invites us to consider our own roles in this ongoing narrative. As readers, we are called not just to appreciate Black music’s artistry and historical significance, but to engage with it as a living, breathing force that can inspire change.

In these pages, you will find a profound exploration of the intersections between music and social justice, grounded in a commitment to amplifying voices that have too often been marginalized. The Humanities Collaboratory at the University of Michigan was an innovative initiative to support and foster collaborative, interdisciplinary research in the humanities. The authors draw on their own experiences, research, and creative practices to illuminate how Black music has been and continues to be a powerful vehicle for resistance, empowerment, and collective action.

As you journey through this book, I encourage you to approach it not just as a reader, but as an active participant in the conversation it seeks to spark. Let the words and ideas presented here resonate with you, challenge you, and inspire you to think critically about the role of music in the fight for social justice, a “Singing Justice.”

“The Art of Democracy,” with its rhythms of resistance that pulse through these pages, in various forms of artistic expression, from visual arts to performance, should be used to engage with, critique, and influence democratic ideals and practices in your communities and beyond.

In closing, I want to express my deep gratitude to the authors of this manifesto. Your insights and contributions are a true gift—not just to the fields of scholarship but to everyone who believes in the power of music to create a more just and fair world.

“Black Song” is a work of profound importance, and I am honored to introduce it to you.

With respect and solidarity,
Thomas Hampson

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the Humanities Collaboratory at the University of Michigan for supporting our work. Special thanks are due to Kristin Hass, director, who guided our project conception, and Sheri Systema-Geiger, project manager, who helped us solve many administrative challenges. Special thanks are also due to Barbara Rühling, our book sprint facilitator and guide, and Olga Panteleeva, who led some of our first conversations on race and social identity. We are grateful to the many scholars who met with us and shared their insights, including Michael Eric Dyson, Dana Gioia, Charles Hughes, Matthew D. Morrison, Oliver Ragsdale Jr., Feodies Shipp III, Dwandalyn Reece, and Kira Thurman. Candace Bailey, Kathryn Dey, Joyce Garrett, Anthony Kelley, Grant Knox, Heather Platt, and Cornelia Weidner were generous hosts of our seminar recital performances.

Introduction

This book was written by the Singing Justice Collective, a research group formed through the University of Michigan Humanities Collaboratory. Our team included eleven university-trained musicians and scholars who worked together from 2019 through summer 2025 to discuss and unpack meaningful connections between race and music in the United States. Our practice has been to construct and leverage the team's diversity to confront difficult subjects with courage and personal insight. We have challenged one another to embrace our individual and collective vulnerability to grow as thinkers and people.

We wrote this book during a period of profound confrontations over race, culture, and history in the United States. We began this work during the second big wave of the Black Lives Matter protest movement after the killings of unarmed Black people, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The summer of 2020 saw global protests against the violence perpetrated on Black people, particularly at the hands of police. These protests tapped into a strong new outrage, as well as a long and deep history of Black resistance to governments and other institutions devaluing the humanity of Black people.

During our work, we also witnessed efforts by US elected officials and others to limit the teaching of Black history. Much of our early work was inspired by the *1619 Project* of Nikole Hannah-Jones and others in the *New York Times Magazine*.¹ Those writings focused on the experiences of slavery and centered the ways in which slavery has shaped American history. While the *1619 Project* addresses music to some extent, our project takes the notion of **Black Song** (which we will discuss further in chapter 1) as an entry point not only for understanding music but for understanding the United States and its past.² The concept may be useful for understanding Black musical creativity across the globe, but given the perspectives and backgrounds of those of us in the Singing Justice Collective, we focus our claims and observations on music culture in the United States and its particular notions of race, the legacy of its unique form of chattel slavery, and the Black/white racial dynamic of US politics and culture.³ Black

Song is vital in understanding American life in the past and present and into the future. Hopefully, as you read this book, you will be impressed by the resilience of African American musicians, moved by stories of how Black Song has brought people together, and inspired to start or to keep making and engaging with music in this tradition.

Our goals in writing this book are to share the insights and practices that have become part of our collective understanding of Black Song over the past six years. While we aspire to write as one collective voice, we also recognize that the writing process necessarily reflects the unique viewpoints, opinions, and experiences of eleven separate authors. Our understandings are shared but not identical. Our text often speaks as a unified “we,” but individuals sometimes share personal experiences in signed portions of the text.

Diversity is essential to our practice, so we built our team and recruited members with this goal in mind. We see the team’s range of experiences and perspectives as our greatest strength. Our collective embraces divergent experiences of race, ethnicity, class background, gender, academic rank, scholarly discipline, and religion, while encompassing generational and geographical variance. Five members identify as African American; six identify as white. We come from the Northeast (New York, Pennsylvania), the West (Washington), the Midwest (Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri), and the South (Kentucky, South Carolina, Virginia). Our team is also international. One group member, who was integral to getting the collaboration started, is Russian. Two others were born in the United States but have long lived in Germany and Austria.

We received generous financial support from the University of Michigan’s Humanities Collaboratory, a project for bringing scholars together from across the university (and beyond) to do collaborative research in the humanities. Our collaboration progressed through three phases connected to three types of grants. In the fall of 2019, an initial small group of faculty explored project possibilities and recruited additional members for the collaboration, including graduate students. This work led to a planning grant and subsequent exploratory work during the spring and summer of 2021, involving two months of almost daily meetings to discuss current scholarship and reflect on our relationships to race as individuals, as lovers of music, and as a collaborative ensemble. These meetings resulted in a successful two-year project grant that supported weekly discussions, extensive reading and research, and exploratory performances and presentations across the United States and in Germany and Austria. The project period culminated in a five-day retreat in Maine when ten team members drafted the book you are now reading. Two shorter editing retreats followed.

For us as members of the Singing Justice Collective, the most important outcome of our work has been the group itself. Our collaboration has changed

each of us in numerous big and small ways. To write this book and do our work, we had to engage in difficult conversations and confront many of our core experiences and beliefs. This work was often exhausting. It required a great deal of emotional and intellectual commitment, but we have found it to be immensely rewarding. You are reading a book rooted in hours of talking and listening, studying, compromising, collaborating, arguing, laughing, singing, crying, eating together, and writing side by side. We hope that you come away from this book willing to think about music in new ways and to share and experience music with others in new ways. We have changed not only as scholars and performers but also as people. We remain colleagues but have also become lifelong friends, cheerleaders, and supporters. We wish you a similar journey of discovery and growth.

Combining Performance and Scholarship

A unique dimension of our group is that it brings together performers and scholars. We sought to combine research and performance into a single investigative methodology. Additionally, heavily influenced by performance studies, we believe embodied knowledge—the knowledge that comes from physically being part of a performance—is as important as traditional academic scholarship. We highlight the value of the distinctive elements of live performance—the siren of the urban landscape blaring through, an unexpected musical mistake, an improvisation—that are too often seen as less relevant than the notated instructions or recorded artifact of a composer’s vision.

We also set out to explore the act of performance as both an opportunity for dialogue and a method of research. Musical performances often feature performers singing or playing for a passive audience that has little opportunity to share its thoughts. In lecture recitals, performers sometimes impart additional information to the audience, but this is typically a one-way conversation. We recognize, however, that everyone who comes to a concert has experiences, thoughts, and ideas about music. Thus, we sought to build a dialogue among musicians, researchers, and audiences to learn more about music as something embodied and experienced by everyone in the room. We believe this approach to be a natural outgrowth of the practices of Black Song, in which audience engagement in the form of dancing, commenting, cheering, and singing along have been a core component of musical performance.

Our resulting innovation is what we call the “**seminar recital**.” An evolution of the traditional lecture recital, seminar recitals blend formalized and embodied systems of knowing through design, musical performance, audience engagement, and data collection. The goal is to use performance as a tool to generate

new knowledge by asking and answering questions of performers, scholars, and listeners.

As performers and scholars, we carefully craft the performance of the repertoire in our seminar recitals as we get to know the music deeply. We examine well-known music, both classical and popular, as well as obscure and less remembered works. We learn how a song came to be, from the weaving together of text and music, to the ways distinct performers brought it to life, and to the ways various audiences have given a song new meanings. We examine the time in which a song emerged, its varied afterlives, and the legacies it has left behind. We explore the historical contexts and events that happened during its heyday. We consider the relationship to other songs that speak to the era of a song's birth. These past and present connections between music and Blackness have shaped how we think about Black Song.

We have presented seminar recitals in many kinds of venues and for a range of audiences. Our audiences included college students in the humanities at the University of Michigan, choirs in Southern churches, congregations in Michigan churches, college students at North Carolina Central University (an HBCU), and attendees at the 2022 George Shirley Vocal Competition, among others.⁴ Through anonymous polls, open audience discussions, reflection papers, online surveys, and focus groups, we gathered our audiences' insights and opinions to inform subsequent recitals and our research. We put on seminar recitals devoted to a wide range of styles of music and historical experiences, intentionally seeking to focus on the common features and the diversity of Black Song. Although we de-emphasized the notion of musical "genre" when discussing our performances, we gave concerts of songs that stylistically could be described as operatic arias, spirituals, musical theater, classical song, jazz, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, protest song, and gospel. We learned how our interlocutors thought about Black Song, what it meant to perform it, who could perform it, and how it affected listeners. The resulting data informs every part of this book.

Our exploration of Black Song through the seminar recital has also led us to an engagement with what we are calling **Black Space**. Discussed in chapter 2, we define Black Space as a literal physical space as well as a metaphorical one that emerges from social and cultural interactions that are characteristic of Black cultural practice and essential to its artistic practices. Our emphasis showcases music. Compared to many white or mainstream spaces, for example, Black Space invites listeners to contribute more frequently to musical performance, such as by clapping, shouting, commenting, or singing. Here, performance is often an exchange, and the line between performer and audience is fluid. Similarly, a Black Space often foregrounds the transfer of knowledge from elders to performers, making the performance an educational experience of community construction, support, continuity, and growth.⁵

This Book

We imagine our readers broadly as those who love music and want to deepen their knowledge of Black Song. We hope our book will be useful to everyone, including those who are not musicians or who have no experience with musical training. We are also interested in sharing our insights and experiences with those who face similar challenges as performers, music historians, and teachers. One of those challenges is that for many of us, Black music was not part of our early formal education. The songs and stories we share have mostly been learned outside of instruction in schools of music and higher education institutions.

This book is thus an invitation to include a broader notion of music in educational experiences. Throughout the text and especially in our song biographies, we recommend specific musical works as entry points for examining Black Song, in part because they have been useful in our own work. These songs prompted deep introspection on issues of race and culture, inspired vibrant classroom discussions, and stimulated compelling post-concert conversations. The strategies we share were learned through experience. Often these discoveries resulted from mistakes or poorly stated observations that compelled us to confront our own lack of knowledge or to seek a more compassionate perspective. We all start from a limited set of experiences and perspectives.

Our research centers race, and we have explored the intersectional nature of race and gender (as well as class, nation, religion, region, and sexuality) in discussions of specific songs and artists.⁶ While we have focused at times on the gendered dynamics (and various other dynamics) of a song or artist, we realized that a more thorough discussion of gender was outside of the scope of what we could address in this book. We recommend the writings of scholars such as Daphne A. Brooks, Angela Davis, Nina Eidsheim, Ruth Feldstein, bell hooks, and Jennifer Lynn Stoeve, whose works have provided important insights to members of our group on issues of race and gender in Black music, especially in the relationship between Black feminism and music.

Our collective goals for this volume include the following:

1. To argue that Black Song is a needed foundation for understanding and sharing the power of American music and the Black American experience.
2. To showcase how Black Song disrupts and expands the canons of musical value, suggesting a pathway to a more inclusive, just, and accurate understanding of the art.
3. To demonstrate the utility of Black Song as a tool for dialogue on race, justice, history, and the Black Experience.

4. To share examples of how Black Song can teach empathy and understanding across social differences.
5. To invite you to enter Black Space with respect and appreciation, and, as a result, to experience the power of Black Song.

Chapter Overview

Black Song is divided into three sections, which can most broadly be understood as outlining the (1) theory, (2) context, and (3) practicalities of studying, teaching, and performing Black Song.

The first section includes three chapters that are largely theoretical in nature. These chapters define “Black Song” and then discuss it in reference to Black communities and to American culture more broadly. Chapter 1 outlines our approach to Black Song and explains our process for defining it. We highlight debates around defining and studying Black music. Most broadly, we invite you to consider Black Song less as a genre than as a series of practices and a community philosophy of interacting with music. We theorize Black Song as an act of musical creation and performance that emerges from Black experiences, affirms Black humanity, and connects to Black communities.

The next two chapters refine this definition and put it into historical and social context. Chapter 2 discusses the origins and roles of Black Song in explicitly Black Space. We are studying Black Song on its own terms in the spaces where it was first created. This chapter charts the development of Black Song in segregated communities, churches, venues, schools, performances, etc. These spaces were entirely or overwhelmingly composed of African Americans in the decades after the US Civil War. We highlight many of the ways of performing and teaching Black Song that were passed along and handed down in these communities.

Chapter 3 discusses Black Song within the larger social and historical context of the United States, directly tied to protest and activism. African Americans have constituted a sizable and significant minority. As a whole, however, American culture is generally dominated by the perspectives of white people and through ideologies of white superiority. We need only to look at the persistence and defense of slavery in the 1700s and 1800s to illustrate this cultural power historically. This chapter shows how enslaved people used music to resist those who branded them as property. They asserted their humanity and formed communities, and these practices of covertly and overtly challenging white domination helped shape Black Song. We connect the resistance to dehumanization in the past to the ways Black people continue to turn to Black Song to push back against racism and other forms of oppression.

The second section of this book provides important context for looking at Black Song and its relationship to history and institutions such as universities and concert halls. Chapter 4 narrates three histories of race and music. We examine (1) the importance of Black churches and their music as a critical meeting space, (2) the hidden and somewhat unexpected persistence of Black classical music, and (3) the dehumanizing and harmful practices and legacies of blackface minstrelsy. We then consider the ways in which these musical pasts are connected to our present.

Chapter 5 turns to Black Song and its relationship to canons, including in classical and country music. Canons (groups of a few artists and works celebrated as masterworks or as most authentic) have functioned to exclude or marginalize Black artists, Black audiences, and Black experiences. Gatekeepers limiting who gets into the canon have included universities, conservatories, and officials in the music industry. Black Song conflicts with these hierarchical and racialized ways of thinking about music. The canon as an idea is so firmly entrenched in America's musical institutions that completely removing it is unlikely, so we offer approaches to expand some of the core tenets of these canons.

The third and final section turns to practical matters, offering roadmaps for performing and teaching Black Song as well as conducting and producing Black Song research. Chapter 6 examines one of our key interventions, the seminar recital. These music performances draw from Black musical practices and invite interactions and dialogues among performers, audiences, and music researchers. The seminar recital encourages audiences to understand the music in relation to the processes of community and performance. We offer the seminar recital as a practice for bringing together everyone involved in music (the performer, audience, songwriter, composer, etc.) to learn and think about the music collectively.

Chapter 7 is tailored to readers who teach music, culture, and history in schools, universities, museums, and other venues. We build on the histories from the fourth chapter to show how some of us—as college instructors—share music in our classrooms. We find that music can be a valuable and accessible tool for getting students to engage with difficult topics, and we offer some guidance for how you, the reader, can use music to teach about exciting and sometimes difficult topics. We end the chapter by providing an example of a holistic approach to teaching singers of all ethnic backgrounds about classical Black Song. The Singing Down the Barriers Institute, a two-week summer program, acknowledges and unpacks barriers of ignorance and ambivalence while educating singers about how to enter the space of classical Black Song with respect and knowledge.⁷

Chapter 8 is designed to help readers begin their own journeys with research into Black Song. We describe our innovative methods, from our collaborative writing process for this book to our various experiences in using performance as a site for conducting and disseminating our research. Because finding comprehensive and accurate information about Black Song online can be difficult, we include descriptions of newly developed internet resources that contain a wealth of information in easy-to-use databases or websites, including the companion site to this book, singingjustice.org.

Throughout the book, we have sprinkled short histories and observations about numerous songs. We call these “**song biographies**.” Here we flesh out the relationships between individual performances or songs and the themes we address in the book. The song biographies are models for understanding how Black Song functions. These song biographies are just a few examples of the countless ways that Black Song exists in the world.

The Singing Justice Collective / Contributing Writers (in alphabetical order):

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Naomi André is the David G. Frey Distinguished Professor in the Department of Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is professor emerita at the University of Michigan. From 2021 to 2022 she was a co-PI on this Singing Justice grant. During the 2022–2023 academic year, she was the John E. Sawyer Fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. Her books include *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (2018), *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (2006), and the co-edited collections *The Music of Mzilikazi Khumalo: Language, Culture, and Song in South Africa* (2024), *African Performance Arts and Political Acts* (2021), and *Blackness in Opera* (2012).

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Stephen A. Berrey is an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and associate professor of American Culture and History at the University of Michigan. From 2021 to 2025 he was a co-PI on this Singing Justice grant. He is the director of the Sundown Towns Project and website (<https://justice.tougaloo.edu/>), an initiative begun by James W. Loewen to document places that have intentionally excluded some racial groups. In that role, he works with communities and students in learning about and discussing these difficult local histories. He is the author of *The Jim*

Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi (2015). He has written numerous articles on teaching and talking about hard history related to Jim Crow, sundown towns, and blackface minstrelsy.

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Mark Clague, PhD

Mark Clague serves as executive director of the University of Michigan's Arts Initiative as well as professor of musicology and arts leadership & entrepreneurship at its School of Music, Theatre & Dance, in addition to appointments in American Culture and Afro and African American Studies. His research on Black music began as an editorial assistant for the *International Dictionary of Black Composers* (1999) at the Center for Black Music Research in Chicago under the guidance of Samuel A. Floyd Jr. His books include *The Memoirs of Alton Augustus Adams, Sr.: First Black Bandmaster of the United States Navy* (2008) and *O Say Can You Hear? A Cultural Biography of "The Star-Spangled Banner"* (2022). He serves as chief advisor to the Black Composers Series of the Rachel Barton Pine Foundation and editor-in-chief of the George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition. Clague served as PI of the Singing Justice project from 2019 to 2021.

Cody Ebright-Jones, PhD

Cody Ebright-Jones is a musicologist specializing in the music of the United States. He completed his doctorate in musicology from the University of Michigan. His dissertation, "Music Making History: Musical Dramatizations of Antebellum US History, 1959–2025," focuses on the uses of music to tell American

history. Originally from Vine Grove, Kentucky, Ebright-Jones received his BA in music from William & Mary in 2017. He has presented at the national conferences of the Society for American Music and the American Musicological Society, and he has forthcoming chapters on the evolving depictions of race in the outdoor drama *The Stephen Foster Story* and on the uses of history in the 1997 film and opera *Amistad*.

Christie Finn

Christie Finn is a classically trained soprano living and working in Europe since 2012 and specializing in contemporary music (christiefinn.com). International festivals include the Bregenzer Festspiele (Austria), the Beijing Modern Music Festival, klarafestival (Brussels), Hamburg International Music Festival, Gaudeamus (Netherlands), Festival Mixtur (Barcelona), and Resonant Bodies (New York City). Finn is also the managing director of baritone Thomas Hampson's Hampsong Foundation (hampsongfoundation.org), a nonprofit organization promoting intercultural understanding and dialogue through the art of song. From 2020 to 2024, she served as the research administrator of the Classic Song Research Initiative, a partnership between the Hampsong Foundation and the University of Michigan. Finn is currently working on her dissertation in historical musicology (Dr. phil/PhD) at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg (Germany). She is often invited to present her research or participate in panel discussions internationally.

Thomas Hampson

Long recognized as one of the most innovative musicians of our time, American baritone Thomas Hampson has received countless international honors for his singular artistry and cultural leadership. His operatic repertoire comprises more than eighty roles performed in leading opera houses around the world, and his discography includes more than 170 albums. He has had multiple nominations and wins of the GRAMMY Award, the Edison Award, and the Grand Prix du Disque.

Hampson has been a Distinguished Visiting Artist in Voice at the University of Michigan in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance. He is an honorary professor of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg and an honorary member of London's Royal Academy of Music. In addition to several honorary doctorates, he is a Kammersänger of the Wiener Staatsoper and Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of the Republic of France. In 2017 he received the Hugo Wolf Medal, together with Wolfram Rieger. Hampson is the cofounder

and artistic director of the Lied Academy Heidelberg. Further teaching commitments include returning for the fourth edition of Opernwerkstatt Waiblingen with Melanie Diener. In 2003, he founded the Hampson Foundation, using the art of song to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Caroline Helton, Doctorate of Musical Arts

Caroline Helton, clinical professor of music, is a pedagogue, performer, and researcher who teaches voice in the Department of Musical Theatre at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. As a performer, she has recorded a classic song repertoire by Italian Jewish composers whose art was suppressed during the fascist period of that country's history, and through her teaching, recordings, and publications, she is a tireless advocate for integrating the canon of song repertoires to reflect and respect its true diversity. Along with Dr. Emery Stephens (St. Olaf College), she is the coauthor of *Singing Down the Barriers: A Guide to Centering African American Song for Concert Performers* (2023).

Traci Lombré, PhD

Traci Lombré, a Kansas City, Kansas, native and long-term resident of Chicago's Southside, is a cultural historian and ethnomusicologist specializing in Black American music's performance culture, pedagogical traditions, and impact on Black community development. She completed her doctorate in American culture at the University of Michigan with the dissertation entitled, "The Harlem Renaissance Ain't About Harlem: Recovering Kansas Communities in the Emergence of Black American Expressive Culture, from Slave Narratives to Bebop." Currently serving as the program coordinator for the Chicago Public Library's (CPL) Renaissance Project, funded by the Mellon Foundation, she leads publicly engaged programs for CPL's 81 branches, promoting stories from its archives on Black Chicago history and music.

Louise Toppin, Doctorate of Musical Arts

Soprano Louise Toppin can be heard worldwide and on recordings in operas, concerts, and as an orchestra soloist. As director of Videmus (videmus.org), cofounder and administrator of the George Shirley Vocal Competition (<https://smt.d.umich.edu/george-shirley-competition>), and founder/editor of the African Diaspora Music Project (africandiasporamusicproject.org), she is a leading researcher on the music of African American composers. She served as co-PI for

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Samantha Rose Williams

Samantha Rose Williams (www.samantharosewilliams.com) is an arts activist committed to sharing marginalized experiences with diverse audiences and creating space for critical discussion about art, culture, and social change. She balances an exciting career in performance and arts leadership and has a deep love for opera, musical theater, and producing. After earning her BA at Stanford University, Samantha went on to receive her master's in music and specialist's in music at the University of Michigan in voice performance. Her latest creation, *American Patriots*, is a music theater production that asks audiences to hold space for multiple truths and look for common ground in the midst of our polarized political landscape. Learn more at americanpatriotstheshow.com

Part I

What Is Black Song?

1: Black Song

An Invitation to a More Just Musical Culture

Key Takeaways

- Black Song is an act of musical expression, creation, and performance that emerges from Black experiences, affirms Black humanity, and connects Black communities.
- Black Song often derives from African music-making traditions but is not limited to these traditions; it may or may not create a recognizable Black sound aesthetic.
- Black Song, in its creation or performance, always reflects on the Black experience, explicitly or implicitly.
- Black Song may be a radical action to articulate Black humanity in an unexpected medium or aesthetic.

Defining Black Song

In 2022, New Orleans native, musician, jazz pianist, and activist Jon Batiste became the first Black artist to win the Grammy's Album of the Year award since jazz pianist Herbie Hancock in 2008. In his acceptance speech for *WE ARE*, Batiste remarked, "It's more than entertainment for me, it's a spiritual practice." He qualified this point, adding, "You know, I really, I believe this to my core: there is no best musician, best artist, best dancer, best actor. The creative arts are subjective, and they reach people at a point in their lives when they need it most. It's like a song or an album is made, and it almost has a radar to find the person when they need it the most."¹ Batiste's statement is both common knowledge and a common practice in Black communities across the United States, where music-making isn't generally art for art's sake, but rather a largely communal expression that serves community needs. These needs can include the desire for songs to be performed that promote the expression or release of emotions that address the intellectual, political, and spiritual concerns of an

individual or group. Batiste's album and the accompanying music videos foreground the spaces in the Black community that perform that role. They directly reflect themes, emotions, values, and experiences that are celebrated within the Black community and beyond. In this regard, the songs of *WE ARE* can be understood as Black Song.

We introduce Black Song as an act of musical expression, creation, and performance that emerges from Black experiences, affirms Black humanity, and connects Black communities. Black artists have participated in virtually every musical tradition in the United States, and Black Song encompasses each of them. As such, we invite you to think about Black Song as a series of practices and a philosophy for interacting with music. We also invite you to think about Black Song as an act—not a thing—and to consider it within the context of all the people involved in the process of making music and the environment from which they come.²

Central to our definition and echoing Batiste, Black Song provides spiritual refuge for Black people, and for others. It can be an outlet for the entire spectrum of human emotion, an expression of Black liberation through music, and a connection to the past, present, and future. Most broadly, Black Song refers to the musical expressions of truths—personal and communal, of the moment and drawn from the past—born of the Black American experience that are rooted in survival and resistance to slavery, segregation, white supremacist ideology, and other forms of oppression. Black Song springs from specific historical and social contexts that shape nearly every aspect of its expression, making it a music of love, sorrow, protest, intellect, joy, mourning, celebration, hope, and frustration. Black Song defies historical gatekeeping that attempts to deny African Americans their basic humanity. Consequently, Black Song acts to build community, claim individuality, celebrate freedom, and communicate messages hidden from mainstream society. It is created under the constraints of a society that discriminates against Blackness.

Throughout our research we have turned to this definition of Black Song to explore the role it can play in dialogues about race, music, and history in the United States. We seek to demonstrate Black Song's place as the foundation of American music and as a product of the Black experience. We also draw on Black Song as a powerful tool to question, disrupt, expand, and renovate the canon in American music studies and in music studies generally. We turn to education and music's power to foreground both emotions and ideas, to illustrate how Black Song can teach human empathy and history across barriers of understanding, including across racial, ideological, and cultural lines.

The book's first section revolves around two related concepts: "Black Song" and "Black Space." We built our research around songs—usually sung, but also

including instrumental works—that can capture or communicate an idea, a feeling, or a thought. We focus on intimate musical expressions and the forms of music that dominate our world. Indeed, today—thanks in large part to the popular music industry—nearly any sort of musical expression is considered a song. The term “Black Song” is meant to encourage us to think broadly about the many ways music can sound, the many people who listen to it, and the many meanings it can hold.

This manuscript is not the first to define and describe the music of Black Americans. From the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, there are isolated accounts—often uncharitable and inaccurate and written by white observers—of the music made by people of African descent in the Americas. The first serious book-length attempt to document the music of Black Americans was *Slave Songs in the United States* (1867) by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison.³ James Monroe Trotter’s *Music and Some Highly Musical People* followed in 1878.⁴ Fifty years later, in the midst of a new wave of Black scholarship and activism, book-length histories of Black American music or large collections of Black American music were written or compiled by John Rosamond Johnson and his brother James Weldon Johnson, by Maud Cuney Hare, and by Alain Locke; these were supplemented by many music critics and commentators writing about jazz, folk, and other musical forms as performed by Black Americans.⁵ At the same time, musicians created musical works that told histories of Black American music, including Duke Ellington’s *Black, Brown, and Beige*.⁶ In more recent decades, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Eileen Southern, Samuel Floyd Jr., Portia Maultsby, and Mellonee Burnim have contributed to the written history of Black American music, and musicians such as Stevie Wonder, Rhiannon Giddens, Jon Batiste, and Questlove continue to make songs and albums and organize festivals about the history and power of Black music.

These writers, musicians, and other intellectuals have offered many ideas about the musical styles created and developed by Black people and about the meaning of Black American music. Their varied positions reflect divisions within the Black community along lines of socioeconomic class, regionalism, ideology, and other issues. Nonetheless, each of these works has revolved around a foundational premise: that Black Americans are vital, creative, and sophisticated musicians. Our book is situated within that tradition.

Characteristics of Black Song and the Black Experience

Many have described the elements that capture the distinctive voice of Black musicians. In the last two centuries several writers and scholars, including

Langston Hughes, Eileen Southern, Olly Wilson, and Portia Maultsby and Mellonee Burnim, have identified sonic features common to Black American music.⁷ Their descriptions vary but several common observations are worth highlighting as a starting point for engaging with Black Song:

- *Call-and-response* is a performance practice in which a singer or instrumentalist makes a musical statement that is answered, often by another soloist, a chorus, an ensemble, or even the audience. This dialogue is common to many forms of African American music derived from African music-making practices.
- *Syncopation* and *polyrhythm* are distinctive rhythmic characteristics of African American music. Syncopation shifts an expected metrical accent to emphasize an unexpected, off-beat impulse; it is heavily used in ragtime compositions. Polyrhythm refers to several contrasting rhythms being played or sung simultaneously.
- A distinctive *sound quality* is a primary element in African and African American music. Such an effect emphasizes the distinctiveness of individual voices and expression as well as the communal participation often present in Black music-making. Examples of Black sound quality include grit, groans, shouts, hand-clapping, foot stomps, and shrieks or cries that can be made by the human voice or imitated on instruments.⁸
- *Improvisation* is one of the most recognizable features in a range of Black musical styles. It involves the real-time invention of musical sounds within a mutually understood framework. In the performance of either a gospel hymn or a jazz standard, for example, it entails a musician sounding pitches, rhythms, harmonies, or text of a song during the performance. Musicians elevate their performance through improvisations to better meet their or the audience's emotional or spiritual needs, often responding to the moment.
- *Polyphony* consists of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody. It contrasts with a musical texture with just one voice (monophony) or a texture with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords (homophony). In gospel, polyphony might be realized by two singers; in blues, the human voice and the guitar can serve as the two melodies; in jazz, it might involve a vocalist and a saxophonist or multiple instrumentalists, such as in traditional New Orleans jazz.
- *The pentatonic scale* consists of a common subset of notes from the diatonic scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 and is used most often in American folk music, including spirituals.
- *Riffs* refer to small repeated melodic cells used to embellish and expand existing material in the music.

Springing from the cultural importance of the oral archives or tradition in African Diasporic cultures, these characteristics are commonly found in Black Song, historically and in the present. They are usually taught, trained, and preserved in Black Spaces—spaces created and defined by Black people—through a community-based training system involving learning from musical or non-musical elders (see chapter 2). These musical and performative characteristics can be applied to any song to nurture a Black sound. It must be noted, however, that these characteristics are typical but not required of Black music-making. They are tendencies, signals, and cultural processes. Possessing one or more does not make a particular song a Black Song, nor does their absence mean that song is not a Black Song. Indeed, alongside these characteristics, it is important to “pay attention to the social, political, cultural, emotional, and psychic worlds that animate Blackness, for these domains are the foundations of Black musical space.”⁹ It is those worlds that reveal a sense of a shared identity and experience, and that have been central to the music that emerges from Black spiritual and educational institutions.

Black music in the Americas—including in the United States—often derives from African music-making traditions that survived enslavement.¹⁰ The first Africans who arrived in the Americas brought their musical sensibilities and practices with them. An example is the ring shout, a dance that involved call-and-response, with dancers moving in a circle, clapping hands and shuffling their feet. Adapted from an African religious dance, the ring shout was especially popular in the South Carolina and Georgia lowlands.¹¹ Africans also brought a community-based training system in which elders employed folktales in song lyrics, riddles, proverbs, and other forms as educational tools. This training system was a hallmark of an oral culture in which wisdom from the elders passed from person to person, generation to generation.¹²

One tradition that demonstrates the connections between African and African American musical practices is the West African griot. As honored individuals in many groups from West Africa, griots create and memorize songs that contain important knowledge about the community and its history, and they pass that knowledge on through performance and repetition. The importance of memorized information illustrates how learning shaped an oral training tradition that became a bedrock of African American musical culture, including in the blues, gospel, and blues-based jazz. Here, the griot method requires that all sounds be remembered and passed along. In this regard, those remembered sounds and remembered pasts can be understood as a canon of African American performance. A musician, like a griot, is entrusted to remember it all (see chapter 5).¹³

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in a proactive effort to develop self-sufficient Black communities, Black abolitionists and white abolitionists



Fig. 1.1. Logo of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc.

worked to establish community institutions that fostered a common culture among the free African American population. Although these individuals were mostly of West African descent, their cultural roots—languages, customs, beliefs, and music—were heterogeneous. For abolitionists engaged in mobilizing this population, it was important to find common cultural threads. African musical performance was one of those threads, documented in spirituals, field hollers, and sorrow and work songs. Similarly, the Black church became a key institution and Black Space. It played a central role in preserving and codifying African American musical and performance traditions, as it also became a site for communal support and political organizing.

Into the twentieth century, a sense of a collective Black identity shaped musical development and contributed to political, social, and cultural movements. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing"



Fig. 1.2. J. Rosamond (standing) and James Weldon Johnson at the piano.
James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the James Weldon Johnson Foundation.

(1900) represented a musical and lyrical effort to express “the American Negro, historically and spiritually.”¹⁴ Highlighting the overlap between Black musical production and political mobilizations, in 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) officially adopted the song, and it came to be understood as a Black national anthem.¹⁵ That same year, a group of Black musicians, led by Nora Holt and Henry Grant, formed the National Association of Negro Musicians to preserve the concert traditions within the Black community. Expressions of Black culture and life in music, as well as in literature, poetry, and art, also anchored the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s and the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Artists referenced racial pride, celebrated a proud African past, and insisted on self-definition, imbuing their work with cultural and political meaning. Historically, Black musical and artistic efforts have promoted and been intertwined with political and social organizing.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” (1900)

Lyrics by James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938)

Music by J. Rosamond Johnson (1873–1954)

Recognized as the “African American National Anthem,” or “Black National Anthem,” “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was a communal force in the Black community long before the Black Lives Matter movement. Since the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, however, the song has appeared increasingly as part of national civic events, such as at the Super Bowl for the first time in 2021, when it was performed as an expression of racial inclusion and recognition just prior to “The Star-Spangled Banner.”¹⁶ Its power to signal community dates from its first public performance by 500 schoolchildren at the Edwin M. Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida, where the lyricist, James Weldon Johnson, was the school principal.¹⁷

Sources disagree about the song’s beginnings. Some report that the text existed as a stand-alone poem before becoming a song. In his autobiography *Along This Way* (1933), James Weldon Johnson explains that two things inspired the song. First, the author admired a poem about Abraham Lincoln written by a Southern white man, but felt that “there was yet to be written a great poem on Lincoln, the expression of a Negro.”¹⁸ Second, Johnson was invited to offer an address to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday in 1900. Johnson’s attempt to write an epic poem about Lincoln “took on another form.” After discussing the project with his brother and songwriting partner J. Rosamond, the pair “planned to write a song.” After grinding out a few lines of the opening stanza, the remainder came easily as the “spirit of the poem had taken hold.” The poet gave the completed first verse to his brother, who began composing the music. Once the final two verses came into focus in his mind, the poet “could not keep back the tears.” For James Weldon Johnson, the lyric expressed “the American Negro, historically and spiritually.”¹⁹

The lyric is full of hope and promises to “march on until victory is won,” yet each verse traverses a challenge from a painful past into a hopeful present. The lyric is a repository of history at a time when enslavement was a very real memory for many. The second verse, especially, identifies the weary, stony road walked by Black Americans. Here the poet embraces graphic depictions of suffering and violence. This hard-won pathway to freedom has led through the “blood of the slaughtered” and been “watered” with “tears.” Yet the children who first sang it had not experienced these traumas. The song perpetuates the memory of their forebears, yet they are now charged to create the future, to walk “out of the gloomy past,” to be “true to our God” and “true to our Native land.”

Their song remained alive in the South and took on a life of its own among the Black community. The lyricist writes that the schoolchildren of Jacksonville “kept singing the song,” and over the next two decades, it “was being sung in schools and churches and on special occasions throughout the South.”²⁰ In 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—for whom James Weldon Johnson soon served as executive secretary—adopted the song as the “Negro national hymn.” The question of whether to call the song the national “anthem” or a “hymn” has occasionally created controversy. Certainly, the song offers a more equitable vision of the United States and one that has yet to be achieved. Yet the lyric does not seek to replace or become the nation’s anthem. Instead, it vows a commitment to the nation and true freedom.

In the contemporary United States, a sense of a shared Black cultural identity continues to be expressed in fashion, the visual and the performing arts, colloquial speech, and cuisine—and in the ongoing political demands for social and economic justice. Black artists have turned to Black Song to share musical expressions of truths that shaped the Black American experience rooted in survival and in resistance to slavery, segregation, and oppression. Those truths appeal to a universal human experience within the constraints of a society that attempted to deny African Americans their humanity. Across these historical periods, Black experiences have shaped the styles of music that Black Americans learn and perform. Across every musical style, Black artists have expressed their creativity as a force of Black liberation and a source of social power. This includes folk music forms such as spirituals, field hollers, and the sorrow songs and work songs, which evolved into the blues form and aesthetic, as well as the popular music styles of the twentieth century and into the present.

Black Song also found expression in classical music spaces. As communities established educational institutions, such as normal schools (specializing in training teachers) that expanded to become high schools and historically Black colleges and universities, formal training in European classical music education became standard in Black cultural spaces. Classical European musical heritage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also made its way into the Black church, the center of African American life. Many Black “urban churches sponsored concerts of sacred vocal, choral, and orchestral music by such composers as Handel, Haydn, and Mozart (and frequently also by Black composers) performed by local talent and guest artists.”²¹ In Black communities, music-making and performance from the African and European classical traditions have been practiced side by side since the establishment of the urban Black community and school system. This is why Black Song can-

not be defined separately from the spaces, communities, and experiences from which it was created and performed.

The Limits of and Tensions in our Definition of Black Song

In highlighting the Black experience at the heart of Black Song, we acknowledge that any notion of a singular Black experience would be monolithic and even reductive. As scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes, “black people have been arguing with each other since the eighteenth century about what it means to be black.” Referencing census numbers, Gates further observed, “There are 42 million African-Americans in this country, which means there are 42 million ways to be black.”²² We agree with that observation and would add that there are similarly many useful and accurate ways—perhaps 42 million—to define Black Song. We have often discussed and debated our own definition. We offer this version not to the exclusion of other possibilities but rather to illustrate the ways in which Black Americans and their experiences—so often silenced or misunderstood—have been at the center of American music throughout its history. That objective made it imperative for us to consider the ways in which a shared cultural identity and shared experiences among Black Americans shaped their musical creation. We recognize the tension between the idea of a collective Black experience and the reality of Black experiences, and our understanding of Black Song does not negate the diversity of individual Black experiences. Related questions, which we address below, also regularly surfaced in our explorations of Black Song.

Is Every Song Written by a Black Person Considered Black Song?

In defining Black Song, we have considered whether a Black composer could write a song that we would not identify as a Black Song, if it lacked certain African music-making characteristics. An example we discussed is “Love, Let the Wind Cry” (1961) by African American composer Undine Smith Moore. Written for classical voice with piano accompaniment and using a text by the ancient Greek poet Sappho, “Love, Let the Wind Cry” addresses the human expression of love, bearing no inherently Black musical or performance characteristics other than its composer’s personal identity. This song fits comfortably within the musical landscape of American and British classical song of the 1960s. Moore’s writing reveals a rich neoromantic harmonic language painted with a sweeping, text-based melodic line that is consistent with the writing of her white contemporaries such as Samuel Barber and Frank Bridge. Would it still be considered Black Song by our definition? Even though syncopation and call-



Fig. 1.3. Undine Smith Moore.

Photo by Mark Mitchell, courtesy Mary Easter.

and-response phrasing are present in the construction of this song, one might question the presence of audible qualities that would identify it as Black Song. If we consider the broader definition identified earlier in this chapter—"the social, political, cultural, emotional, and psychic worlds that animate Blackness"—it is easy to see that this song still fits the definition as a Black Song.²³

This very question was being debated by Black artists in the 1960s within the Black Arts Movement and its attention to content focused on Black pride and African Diasporic traditions.²⁴ While some in the Black Arts Movement argued for Black artists to focus on those African Diasporic forms, other artists made a case for Black involvement in classical music. In 1969, for example, the Society for Black Composers defended "their right to compose 'Eurocentric' music."²⁵ This group claimed classical musical traditions as their own, as evidenced in a May 1969 newsletter attested to by musicologist Eileen Southern.

And while a common vocabulary or grammar is not even desirable among black composers, a new and highly desirable consensus of positive and assertive attitudes is clearly emerging. The questions of a year ago—most often

concerning which specific musical sounds and materials would be necessary to make black music—are no longer necessary. We know that because we are black, we are making black music. And we hear it, too!²⁶

As Black composers struggled for acceptance in the world of classical music, they concurrently fought for the right to self-determination as Black classical composers.

To create art is uniquely human, and thus to dance, paint, sculpt, write, or compose song is to embrace humanity itself. This notion was the motivation for the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, for any whose very humanity has been denied, to make art, regardless of its content or expression, is a subversive act of both resistance and revolution. All song is always already political, and Black Song is essentially so.

Who Decides What Is Black Song?

While many of us are familiar with or have a concept of Black music, it is necessary to recognize that Black artists have routinely lacked complete agency in defining and producing Black Song. It might be tempting to say “Black people” get to decide if something is Black Song or not, but the diversity of opinions within the Black community means consensus can be impossible to reach. The widely publicized “rap beef” between West Coast battle rapper and hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar and Canadian rapper Drake reveals how differing conceptions of Black Song can be put on trial.²⁷

In April 2024, Lamar released the diss track, “euphoria,” in response to Drake’s tracks, “Push Up” and “TaylorMade Freestyle,” directed at Lamar. The closing lines of “euphoria,” “We don’t wanna hear you say n*gga no more,” ignited a debate about authentic and inauthentic Blackness in modern hip-hop. Was Drake being unfairly bullied for his biracial background? Or was he being called out for appropriating Black American culture? Did Drake seek to profit from a “familiar” American gangsta-rap stereotype associated with urban life, to which he had no claim as a suburban Canadian attempting to battle rap, a performance style not indigenous to the space in which he was raised?

“euphoria” (2024)

Written by Kendrick Lamar (b. 1987)

Produced by Kyro and Cardo (b. 1984)

In his eagerly awaited diss track “euphoria,” Kendrick Lamar told Canadian rapper Drake “We don’t wanna hear you say n*gga no more,” and the internet exploded. The long-simmering feud between Compton-born, Pulitzer Prize-winning rapper Kendrick Lamar (Duckworth) and biracial, Canadian, hit-song machine Drake (Aubrey Drake Graham) erupted into a historic rap beef. The two argued over Drake’s Blackness, his relationship to rap culture, and his biracial upbringing. While some argued that Lamar was being “colorist” and bullying Drake for being half-white, a deeper analysis of “euphoria” shows that Lamar was taking issue with Drake’s inauthenticity and appropriation of American Black culture.²⁸

The song “euphoria” begins unexpectedly with what sounds like gibberish but is actually a cleverly reversed audio clip from the musical *The Wiz*, where the Wiz admits “Everything they say about me is true. I’m a phony.” Backed by a sample of R&B/soul singer Teddy Pendergrass’s song “You’re My Latest, My Greatest Inspiration” (1981)—a cheeky thank-you to Drake for inspiring these new diss tracks—Lamar soon lays out his main issue with Drake: “You’re not a rap artist, you’re a scam artist with the hopes of being accepted.”

After a misleadingly slow and laid-back intro, the beat drops and the mood shifts as Lamar doubles down on his thesis with countless examples of Drake’s fakeness: from the plastic surgery Drake allegedly underwent to give him six-pack abs (“let your core audience stomach that, then tell ’em where you get your abs from”) to the differing accents Drake has used throughout his career (“It’s no accent you can sell me, huh”). In a particularly piercing dig, Lamar—who hails from Compton, California, a city in Los Angeles County made famous by hip-hop and gang violence—calls out Drake’s glamorization of gun violence and gang culture for being inauthentic and hypocritical (“I hate when a rapper talk about guns, then somebody die, they turn into nuns then hop online like ‘Pray for my city,’ he fakin’ for likes and digital hugs.”).

Lamar’s diss is not only rooted in hip-hop practices but also in the core practices of Black American childhood through the game the Dozens. Lamar draws on these practices several times in the song through a singsong mocking tone as well as clever insults about Drake’s family. The Dozens is a Black childhood tradition of verbal combat in front of an audience in which children wittily insult each other, and commonly each other’s families, until one person gives up. Similar to a rap battle, there are unspoken rules of the Dozens that lead to outsiders and younger

children getting hurt either emotionally or physically as they learn the ropes. In addition to teaching mental acuity, scholars argue, the Dozens teaches an important Black cultural value, the ability to remain composed in the face of injustice.²⁹ Lamar references the Dozens to tell Drake, the outsider, that he hasn't learned the rules of the game and is dangerously close to crossing a line and getting hurt. Lamar cautions Drake with the line "Don't speak on the family, crodie," and then warns him, "Someone gon' bleed in your family, crodie."³⁰

Lamar mockingly sings the word "crodie," calling out Drake's appropriation of American Crip culture. Drake championed the word "crodie," in place of the Canadian slang term "brodie," evoking the American Crips colloquialism of replacing B's with C's. Lamar accuses Drake of profiting off an idea of Blackness that doesn't represent his experience.

Who gets the final word on who won this battle—the music industry or “the culture?” In “euphoria,” Kendrick Lamar argues that in a rap battle, just like in the Dozens, the winner is decided by the popular opinion of the audience.³¹ In “euphoria,” Lamar claims victory and speaks on behalf of Black culture: “And notice, I said ‘we,’ it’s not just me, I’m what the culture feelin’.” He chastises Drake for basing his success not on the culture but on market measures such as profits and international fame. Results came in from TikToks, YouTube reaction videos, tweets, and Black cultural talk shows such as *The Read*, the *Shade Room*, and the *Breakfast Club*, and they overwhelmingly declared Kendrick Lamar the winner.

As this battle ended, it left on the table lingering issues and questions related to authenticity and Black culture: Was Drake being authentic or fake? Can a Black person appropriate Black culture? And ultimately, who decides who's invited to “the cookout”?

Popular music has become a place where Black culture is continually commodified and separated from its contextual and cultural origins.³² The racial power imbalance embedded in the music industry posits largely white-owned record companies as gatekeepers. These labels determine which artists get access to wider platforms and have a disproportionate influence on the way many think about Black Song. Pop, R&B, and gospel singer-songwriter PJ Morton echoed this racial fantasy and gatekeeping of the major record labels in his 2017 song, “Claustrophobic,” in which he describes his experience with label executives suggesting that he conform to their standards of Blackness to sell music. Black artists have often had limited decision-making power over their music.

“Claustrophobic” (2017, 2018)

Performed by PJ Morton (b. 1981), featuring Keyon Harrold (b. 1980)

Lyrics and music by Paul S. Morton and Jared Pellerin (b. 1992)

In 2017, multi-Grammy award winner, singer-songwriter, and pianist PJ Morton released “Claustrophobic,” a song reminiscent of the Motown sound. The soulful rhythms, vocals, and synthesized bass line reflect the influence of Morton’s mentor, Stevie Wonder. The song resonates with anyone who has had big dreams and been discouraged by someone in authority, whose vision for what’s possible is limited. The lyrics capture the feeling of frustration one has when the person in charge suggests that the dreamer shrink themselves to fit their smaller aspirations and conform to succeed. “Claustrophobic” recounts Morton’s disappointment when shopping for record deals as he was pressured to fit in a space that is far too confining for his musical ideas and aspirations, causing a feeling of claustrophobia.³³

Born Paul S. Morton Jr. in 1981 in New Orleans, Louisiana, the son of the prominent pastor Bishop Paul S. Morton, PJ Morton was nurtured to become a gifted pianist, singer, composer, and producer capable of traversing the various expressions of Black music. An accomplished songwriter in his teen years beginning in gospel, he penned the R&B/soul song “Interested” with India.Arie on her 2002 *Voyage to India* album and the hit gospel single “Let Go, Let God” made popular by DeWayne Woods in 2006. He moved to Los Angeles and into the pop scene when he became the keyboardist with Maroon 5, recording and touring extensively with the pop/rock group. He remained with the group for several years before striking out on his own as a solo artist in search of a recording contract.

That experience inspired “Claustrophobic,” and its stanzas are sung as a dialogue. The dialogue begins with the words of record executives trying to change Morton’s music:

PJ, you’re not mainstream enough.
Would you consider us changing some stuff?
Oh, like everything about who you are.

The chorus is Morton’s response, in which he is attempting to push back against their demands:

But I must admit I’m claustrophobic. I—
Have a hard time trying to fit into your small mind,

And I have a habit of dreaming bigger than anything,
I can see right in front of me.³⁴

Morton's song is a story of a performer hoping to acquire an opportunity to take their gift of song to the world while navigating the potential commodification of their musical expression. While the music industry executive is focused on numbers, reach, and money, attempting to pressure the artist into a commercial presentation, the artist is resistant, trying to hold on to their personal values and express themselves authentically to reach their goals. Morton's "Claustrophobic" highlights the challenge faced by many musicians and performers, particularly African Americans who have struggled to maintain musical autonomy and economic control of their personal expression.

"Claustrophobic" was released on Morton Records, his own label. He describes this economic power struggle in song—a struggle that has existed since slavery, perpetuated in the legacy of blackface minstrelsy within the popular music industry. According to scholar Matthew D. Morrison, the impact of the legacy of minstrelsy on popular music today lives on in the idea that non-Black record executives believe they are authorities on how best to be *Black* in music, to sell it.³⁵ Morton fully captures this practice in lyrics, especially when he raps the phrase in his 2018 live studio version of "Claustrophobic" (featuring trumpeter Keyon Harrold), "They clutching to my talents more than Catholics do a rosary."³⁶

Morton's awareness of the historically exploitative relationship that the music industry has had with Black people is confirmed by his own experience with record labels that wanted him to be someone other than himself. Living in Los Angeles at the time, he was determined to go solo and chose to return to his hometown of New Orleans, where he could be himself and pursue his music on his own terms and bolster the city's historic music scene.³⁷ Since doing so, PJ Morton has become a household name and an award-winning artist in R&B/soul, gospel and pop, who blends the sounds coming out of New Orleans to comfort and promote the love and experiences of the Black community.

Can a Black Song Be Written by a Non-Black Composer?

Can a song that specifically acknowledges the Black experience, but that is not written by a Black person or does not have identifiable Black musical or performance traits, be defined as a Black Song? For instance, could the 1939 antilynching song "Strange Fruit," a song made famous by Black blues and jazz singer Billie Holiday and later recorded by Nina Simone, be a Black Song, even though it was composed by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish man?³⁸ An interviewee from one of

our seminar recitals passionately argued that “Strange Fruit” was a Black Song. “It was definitely written for Billie Holiday to sing first,” the student argued, “So I mean, there were no performances of it before her. So in some ways I think . . . is it in some ways her song?” Billie Holiday thought so, as she claimed authorship of the song in her autobiography.³⁹ Indeed, separating the roles of composer and performer is not always a fundamental aspect of Black musical practice. It is often more of a reflection of American copyright law and the institutional practices of the American music industry. Arguably, Holiday not only made the song famous, but her performances also inhabited and expanded the song’s expression, musical content, and meaning.

We have observed similar practices with other songs. In one of our seminar recitals, a participant noted that the hit American pop ballad “I Will Always Love You,” written by white singer-songwriter Dolly Parton in 1968, has become an anthem for the Black community “that has nothing to do with Dolly Parton.” Another musician remarked, “Black Americans have a history of taking something that might not be, in and of itself, a Black thing, [but] if it resonates, adapting it so much into the culture that it becomes . . . it spawns a clone . . . that is a Black thing.” Whitney Houston’s enormously popular 1992 soul-ballad version of Parton’s song appears to have been reinvented as a Black Song.

The song “Summertime” has a similarly complex history. Written by George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward for the opera *Porgy and Bess*, it was sung by Black performers Abbie Mitchell (as Clara) and Anne Brown (as Bess) in the original 1935 production. Signature performances were later recorded by Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, Sam Cooke, and Miles Davis.

“Summertime” from *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

Lyrics by DuBose Heyward (1885–1940)

Music by George Gershwin (1898–1937)

One of the most recorded songs in the history of American music, “Summertime,” by George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward, has migrated effortlessly across diverse musical styles from jazz, blues, and doo-wop to reggae and pop. Written by two non-Black men to propel a story centered on the Black experience, it has been performed by both non-Black and Black artists.

The song began as an operatic aria. It opens the landmark 1935 folk opera *Porgy and Bess*, based on the novel *Porgy* by Heyward and the related play by his wife Dorothy Heyward, with music composed by George Gershwin and addi-

tional lyrics penned by Ira Gershwin. It is a lullaby sung by the young mother Clara, who envelops her child in parental love and sings of her bright hopes for the child's future. Subsequently, Clara and her husband are killed in a hurricane, and their child is orphaned. In retrospect, the gentle lullaby is also a bluesy lament. That understanding is especially apparent in gospel singer Mahalia Jackson's 1956 recording that poignantly mixed Gershwin's lullaby with the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." There, lyrics of "daddy and mammy standing by" sit uneasily alongside feeling "like a motherless child."

Opinions conflict about whether the creation of "Summertime" is an act of cultural theft or celebration. In the opera, Gershwin created a theatrical vehicle that centered Black music and talent in American culture. While Gershwin was seen as a peer, friend, and colleague by some Black musicians, his whiteness and the cultural authority it bestowed allowed his music to triumph in a time when operas by Black composers could not.

Productions of *Porgy and Bess* have traditionally required race-based casting; the African American characters are brought to life by Black artists. This practice has positive and negative impacts. On one side, it creates professional opportunities for deserving and often overlooked Black artists. Further, the performers' artistry helps to bring first-person Black understandings to each role as the actor leverages their own Blackness and creativity to inhabit their character. However, Black performers have too often been typecast, hired only for *Porgy and Bess* and not for other "non-Black" roles.

One can also emphasize the archetypal and universal qualities of *Porgy and Bess*. The lyrics for "Summertime" make little reference to a specifically Black experience. This message instead comes from the context of the opera. Heyward's lyrics speak to a universal aspiration among parents for a child's future happiness. Indeed, singers both Black and white have performed "Summertime" to critical acclaim.

In the classroom, comparing some of the song's more than 25,000 recordings can create the opportunity to wrestle with the thorny issues of appropriation and transformation with reference to specific performers and performances.

Additional multivalency is when the same song has signature performances across race, such as Janis Joplin's rendition of "Summertime" with Big Brother and the Holding Company, released on their 1968 album *Cheap Thrills*. Other examples include Gershwin's spiritual lament "My Man's Gone Now," also from *Porgy and Bess*, as well as John Musto's classical song "Silhouette" (1987), Antonín Dvořák's spiritual "Goin' Home" arranged by his student William Arms

Fisher in 1922 and based on the *Largo* melody of his *New World Symphony*, and Big Mama Thornton's powerful 1952 blues ballad "Hound Dog," credited (maybe too generously) to white Brill Building composers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.

"Hound Dog" (1952)

Music and lyrics credited to Jerry Leiber (1933–2011) and Mike Stoller (b. 1933), revised lyrics by Freddie Bell (1931–2008)

Recorded by Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton (1926–1984), August 13, 1952

Recorded by Elvis Presley (1935–1977), July 2, 1956

"Hound Dog" helped propel Black sounds into mainstream rock music. Created specifically for and in collaboration with blues singer Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, nineteen-year-old songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller "forged a tune to suit her personality—brusque and badass."⁴⁰ "Hound dog" was a slang expression used to describe a man who sought a woman to take care of him, as Thornton sang, "you ain't looking for a woman, all you looking for is a home." The song's female lead kicks this manipulative lover out. The original lyrics draw on the blues tradition of double entendre with sexual innuendos, such as "You can wag your tail / But I ain't gonna feed you no more."

Thornton's penetrating shout opens her 1952 recording. She wails "You ain't nothing but a hound dog." Her emotion and determination are conveyed by the grit (vocal fry) that colors her voice, using a signature vocal technique of a Black blues shouter. A trio of drummer Johnny Otis, bassist Mario Delagarde, and guitarist Pete Lewis enters on the word "Hound," and the guitar immediately engages in "call-and-response" with Thornton, another Black Song aesthetic.

"Hound Dog" is a classic blues song, as evidenced by its musical form. It is written in strophic form, meaning that a short section of music—called a "strophe"—repeats regularly throughout the song. As in many other blues songs, each strophe in "Hound Dog" is made up of twelve measures (or "bars") in a pattern called a "twelve-bar blues." While the backing music (or accompaniment) is roughly the same for each strophe, the lyrics are often different. In Thornton's song, there is a repeating set of lyrics (which begins "You ain't nothing but a hound dog") that serves as a chorus. She intersperses this with verses sung to the same melody but with new lyrics ("You told me you was high class" and "You made me feel so blue"). In the middle of the song, Lewis takes a guitar solo.

"Hound Dog" was the most successful recording of Thornton's career, selling an estimated 500,000 to 750,000 copies, but Thornton claimed that she

“got one check for \$500 and never saw another.”⁴¹ In contrast, Elvis Presley’s 1956 recording sold over four million copies in its first release and was the rock-’n’-roll star’s best-selling single. It spent eleven weeks at number one on the *Billboard* charts and would eventually sell ten million copies worldwide. Presley’s version is not Black Song, and the contrast between the two recordings highlights the problem of commercial appropriation and the two versions’ distinct musical features.

Elvis’s song is less a cover of the original than an entirely different song. It does not tell a story in the blues tradition. The original meaning of the song has been transformed with a revised lyric created by Freddie Bell and the Bellboys for their Las Vegas act.⁴² Bell’s lyric is in essence a nonsense song. It is not the story of a woman used but a song ostensibly about a dog.

Presley’s recording is an up-tempo dance track. It is much faster than Thornton’s, clocking in at about 170 beats per minute compared to Thornton’s 150. Yet Elvis’s version has a rapid 4/4 feel, while Thornton’s version emphasizes the backbeat and thus feels half as fast. While Presley is often described as a white singer who sounded Black, he sounds little like Thornton. The grit that characterizes her voice is absent and the call-and-response is gone.

Several Singing Justice Collective members use “Hound Dog” as an effective discussion tool in music courses. Employing YouTube videos of both artists performing the song for comparison works well, and students identify the differences between the two recordings in terms of tempo, instrumentation, lyrics, vocal timbre, and meaning. These differences can readily be placed in the context of the two artists and their differences related to gender and race.

Can a Non-Black Musician Perform Black Song?

A fundamental conclusion of the Singing Justice Collective is that anyone can perform Black Song if they approach the song and the space in which it is performed with informed respect. Singing Justice team member Louise Toppin explains, “Respect means a willingness to do the hard work to present Black music with the same level of rigor, research, and exactness afforded to other music, particularly classical music that we study in the academy. Anyone who has taken this level of care has earned the right (permission) to perform Black music.” Fundamental to any musical performance is the commitment to perform the work in a way that honors and extends the vision of its creators. To perform a Schubert song is to commit to understanding the text and its pronunciation, to understanding the style of early-nineteenth-century German lieder, and to performing the song skillfully in ways that honor the music’s notation, traditions, and social contexts. To sing it respectfully, one must know the history

of a song and the social world from which it was created and performed. The same could be said of the music of Undine Smith Moore and Kendrick Lamar. To limit the realization of musical art to those who share identical characteristics with its creator is to impoverish not only music but human culture as a whole. Empathetic intent is vitally important.

These questions—about what is and isn't Black Song, who gets to make these decisions, and who is allowed to sing Black Songs—are complicated for many. This is not due simply to the very real intellectual issues surrounding cultural appropriation and being separated from its cultural and social context, but to unaddressed or unexamined cultural or societal assumptions. While we believe that there is immense value in grappling with the existential tensions at the heart of defining Black Song, we acknowledge that there are times when a question about whether something is appropriate—or even if it is appropriation—is not settled, even among the people belonging to the group most closely associated with the music.

By proposing a concrete definition of what Black Song is, we have established a set of goals of what Black Song can do in a larger dialogue about race and music in the United States. As a collective, we seek to explore the ways in which Black Song is at once the foundation of American music and a product of and record of the Black experience.

2: Black Song Spaces

Key Takeaways

- Black Space is a space of Black liberation and joy, radical humanity, education, learning, healing, and restoration.
- Music-making is a fundamental activity in Black Space, and in this context takes on various meanings and functions according to the community's needs.
- Black Song can create and maintain Black Space. This is true even when not in a specifically Black Space or in spaces hostile to Blackness.
- Engaging with Black Song as a non-Black musician or listener necessitates cultural humility to avoid cultural appropriation and its harms.
- When Black Song is moved out of Black Space, there is a danger that the key features of Black musical and historical traditions will be lost, as in the conservatory-style jazz education prominent in conservatories, colleges, and universities.

In 2022, in addition to the Grammy Award for the Album of the Year, Jon Batiste also won the award for Best Music Video for “FREEDOM.” Batiste hoped that for the viewer, the video would take away “any depression, any darkness and bondage that was in your life” and replace it with joy.¹ Filmed in a Black neighborhood in Batiste’s hometown of New Orleans, the video opens in a Black Space: two Black women are on a porch, one sweeping while the other prepares to water plants; three young Black boys drum in unison on buckets; preteen Black girls play jump rope as a young Black girl, playing with a young white girl, draws hopscotch lines; and two older Black men play cards at a table. Batiste pulls up in a 1970s Cadillac El Dorado. When he exits the car, wearing a shiny rose-colored suit, he brings joy. He sings about the freedom he feels in moving his body in particular ways and freedom in the performance of moving his body with the music.²

The song and setting are celebratory, promoting a familiar New Orleans scene where music and dancing can seemingly break out anywhere, anytime. Here, one can visualize life in a Black Space when times are joyous, seeing the images of Black freedom and the cultural infrastructure of a New Orleans Black Space that can include a marching band, parades, street dancers, gospel choirs, Black Indian chiefs, contemporary musicians, and brass bands. Those elements probably nurtured and inspired Batiste's music and performance.

"Joy" is a word commonly used to describe the feeling emanating from Batiste's music and performances. "I NEED YOU," the fourth track on the album, is in fact, joyful. Lyrically, it appears to be a song about desire, love, and wholesome attraction. Musically, the song is playfully upbeat. It opens with a simple bass line reminiscent of the boogie-woogie/rock-'n'-roll era of the late 1940s/1950s, accompanied by light, bluesy piano chords to introduce Batiste singing.³

The music video for "I NEED YOU" is set in an art gallery with visual works featuring African Americans. Contemplating a work, Batiste notices a Black woman entering the gallery. He tries to get her attention with conversation as they consider one of the photographs in the exhibit, a late 1940s/1950s swing-dance party scene with a majority of Black dancers and an all-Black band. She remains aloof until Batiste begins dancing, a rhythm section begins playing, and the photo comes to life. She is fascinated with the scene and soon joins Batiste in the dance. Both the gallery and photo are festive, and they showcase two Black Spaces transformed into spaces of joy and celebration through music and dance. Batiste's music video demonstrates the close connection between song and space through Black Song's ability to create Black Space.

What Is Black Space?

Black Space is a place where Black people can thrive, a place of radical Black humanity. Spaces in the United States have so often been controlled by a racial system of segregation designed to reserve the most desired spaces for white people. In this context, creating space for Black humanity is a radical act.⁴ Seeking agency and self-determination against the odds, Black people have often redefined spaces and claimed them as their own. Such spaces can be physical, psychological, or musical. Black Space, where Black people can create and express themselves (physically, mentally, or emotionally), away from the confines of oppressive structures, has often begotten Black Song.

In centering Black Space in our work, we acknowledge a rich legacy of Black scholars exploring Black Space in various contexts and using varied terminology to continue to expand knowledge in this field. This exploration includes physical and theoretical elements, and covers past, present, and future. Some of this

“building” is literal, such as the architectural and urban-planning example of “The BlackSpace Manifesto” of 2019.⁵ Endeavors to define Black Space appear in trade books, such as Beverly Daniel Tatum’s 1997 *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, and in scholarly articles, including Rashad Shabazz’s 2014 “Masculinity and the Mic: Confronting the Uneven Geography of Hip-Hop.”⁶ Scholars pursuing research in this space have often been concerned with questions of feminism and (de)colonization, including those addressed in works by bell hooks, Sylvia Wynter, and Katherine McKittrick.⁷ In our work, James Gordon Williams’s *Crossing Bar Lines: The Politics and Practices of Black Musical Space* is integral to our understanding of the relationship between Black Song and Black Space.⁸

Williams offers an informative perspective on Black music. He examines three generations of Black musicians and improvisers born between 1931 and 1982 (including Terence Blanchard, Ambrose Akinmusire, Billy Higgins, Terri Lyne Carrington, and Andrew Hill) to explore the role of Black musical space in creating Black improvised music. He considers how these musicians used musical expression to affirm their humanity and to articulate what it means to be Black in a world that is often hostile to Blackness. Writing against a backdrop of twenty-first-century state-sanctioned and vigilante murders of Black people, including Eric Garner, Jordan Davis, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the nine congregants of Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, Williams reflects on the role of Black music within the context of these recent acts of violence.

He recognizes that contemporary Black musical space is a powerful force against catastrophe. After all, Black musical space is—as historian Robin D. G. Kelley writes in the foreword to Williams’s book—“a space of joy and beauty that celebrates Black life, Black imagination, Black subjectivity, and Black triumph over adversity.”⁹ Williams expands the essence of Black musical space beyond the context of the horrors of colonialism, slavery, white supremacy, and racial violence to show that these oppressions do not limit or confine Black music and Black music-making. At the same time, these spaces are not simply a reaction to racial oppression. As Kelley observes, Williams “is absolutely right to refuse to treat Black musical space as merely a response to the dehumanizing forces of anti-Blackness.”¹⁰

The Construction and Inheritance of Black Space

For more than 400 years, chattel slavery followed by Jim Crow segregation and anti-Black discrimination have been central to social life in the United States. Among the many ways these systems shaped American lives was through the

development of distinct racialized spaces and identities.¹¹ Sociologist Stephen Small contends that this racialization served two important roles: (1) it shaped the distribution of valuable resources such as housing, education, employment, and political power, and (2) it made normal and routine the various procedures of institutions “that shape and constrain our daily lives . . . [including] politics (voting and political representatives), economics (businesses, employment), education (universities, schools), and health (hospitals) . . . [as well as] other spheres of social life (family, media, music, sport).”¹² In other words, the institutions of slavery and segregation reordered the daily experience of American living in ways that continue into the present. That analysis, though, also points to the existence and primacy of Black Spaces, past and present. Spaces in the Black community, spaces largely controlled by Black people, including churches, social clubs, schools, colleges, stores, barber and beauty shops, banks, theaters, newspapers, and others, have served as critical institutions that nurtured their members toward success. These spaces are directly linked to how Black people make, learn, finance, and perform Black Song.

From the earliest days of slavery, as Europeans colonized the Americas and claimed those spaces as their own, the Middle Passage could be understood as a sometimes Black Space. Songs of lament were first documented on the ships that transported enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.¹³ The Middle Passage subjected millions of Africans to their first cruel lesson in racial separation, exploitation, horror, and death, which would shape Black spaces for generations. The sorrow song “Lord, How Come Me Here?” powerfully illustrates the pain and dismay of this journey and of enslavement in this new place.

Lord, how come me here? (*sung three times*)
 I wish I never was born.
 There ain't no freedom here. (*sung three times*)
 I wish I never was born.
 They treat me so mean here, Lord. (*sung three times*)
 I wish I never was born.
 They sold my children away, Lord. (*sung three times*)
 I wish I never was born.¹⁴

Song became the primary outlet to express emotion in response to Black circumstances. Even as music, dance, and the arts were integral parts of Black communal life on the African continent and in the diaspora, the violence of chattel slavery constrained Black life in ways that made a healthy Black Space nearly impossible. Despite the circumstances endured on innumerable slave ships or in bondage on small farms or large plantations, Black people nurtured

their Black Spaces. In these autonomous places they could escape emotionally, spiritually, and—sometimes—physically to eventually thrive.¹⁵

Black institutions continued to serve important roles after emancipation. Where segregation historically functioned to isolate and deprive the Black community, its members and their institutions instead worked to transform segregated areas into vibrant Black Spaces. Black Space provided autonomy and self-determination, creating an outlet for individual and communal self-expression. For example, the Black church in the South grew dramatically as newly freed people sought opportunities to practice their beliefs and join in fellowship, free from the surveilling eyes of white people. Meanwhile, separate Black schools, which across the South were poorly resourced compared to schools for white students, nonetheless became places where Black students learned from Black teachers, and where they often learned about Black history and culture, including significant Black historical figures. Alongside these key institutions, desires for sovereignty and the creation of Black spaces appeared in seemingly every community with a significant Black population.¹⁶ For example,

Black residents of Nashville created a separate world to escape the indignities of Jim Crow. There was a black business district downtown with banks, a publishing house, and many independent entrepreneurs. In North Nashville, there were three predominantly African American institutions of higher learning. Black leaders and intellectuals, a strong middle class, and working class blacks formed a vibrant community in these neighborhoods. The neighborhood provided all services, from stores to movie theaters, from churches to funeral homes, schools, a library and a fire department.¹⁷

Similar neighborhood institutions took root in cities throughout the South, including Atlanta, Georgia; Durham, North Carolina; and Jackson, Mississippi.

Beyond the South, large physical Black Spaces emerged in many cities, including Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and Kansas City. These cities, each a final destination on the Underground Railroad and later Great Migration destinations, served as spaces of refuge for African Americans fleeing the South and evolved into major centers of Black creativity and music-making. By offering a protected space for Black people to practice radical humanity, Black Spaces gave birth to new Black Songs, which made major contributions to the full landscape of American music.

These cities were among the first areas to develop communities for free Black people, as early as the eighteenth century. Abolitionists played an important role. Prior to the legal abolition of slavery, slave-catchers relentlessly targeted members of free Black communities in states where slavery had been

abolished. Free Black people could be kidnapped and sold for profit. In response, white and Black abolitionists provided protection and support for Black people. They also provided resources for these growing Black communities. Various institutions, including literary associations, mutual aid organizations, schools, and most importantly, churches, provided food, clothing, job leads, security, and education, fostering Black community development and autonomy. Over time, these Black communities became hubs for African American culture.¹⁸

Black Space allowed an African American racialized identity to thrive as it fueled a spirit of resistance to oppression in the past into the present. Black Space has been central to the quest for collective freedom and to claims for the full rights of American citizenship. To practice freedom as Black people meant having the space to express themselves as Americans with a distinct African culture that survived enslavement. Practicing freedom also required community members to resist continual threats to Black autonomy. The resulting spirit of resistance is especially present in culture, and thus in the music originating from these Black cultural centers. Each is known for having nurtured world-class musicians, singers, and composers, as well as for distinct sound associations tied to its jazz, R&B/soul, gospel, and hip-hop artists.¹⁹

Public music education in these Black cultural centers was critical to the development of Black Song and Black Space. This is particularly the case in cities such as Detroit, where highly trained Black musicians, many of whom could not find work in the white institutions for which they had been trained, taught music in the Black public schools. Musicologist Tammy Kernodle notes the influence of music education on musical innovation in twentieth-century Detroit:

While a number of factors contributed to Detroit's growing population of notable and influential jazz musicians, no agent was as important as high schools like Cass Technical and Miller High School in setting a high standard for the training of musicians. Northwestern and Northern also provided basic music education to its students, but Cass Tech and Miller High were significant in producing generation after generation of musicians who advanced jazz in Detroit and beyond.²⁰

Cass Tech alumni include artists such as bassists Paul Chambers and Ron Carter; violinists Regina Carter and Jerald Daemyon; gospel singer J. Moss; rapper Big Sean; pianists Alice Coltrane, Greg Phillinganes, and Geri Allen; and Motown singer Diana Ross, all of whom have disseminated Black Space wherever their music is played across the globe.²¹

Many Black musicians, from Sissieretta Jones to Angel Blue, have staked

positions within classical music, despite facing ostracization and discriminatory practices; many also remained understandably determined that their music be presented without reference to their race. Artists who have refused to be singularly defined by race while nonetheless embracing their Black identity raise questions about what Black Song and Black Space look like in a classical music context. Black Song has rarely been centered in classical music and has most often been tokenized or discounted as not classical enough, especially when foundational elements of African American music are present.²²

The exclusion of Black Song from the classical canon implies that Black music does not belong in the classical space. Yet Black musicians have been involved in all aspects of classical-music-making as far back as the sixteenth century. Pre-nineteenth-century composers such as Vincente Lusitano, Ignatius Sancho, and Joseph Bologne were part of classical music history long before the tradition came to North America and inspired early-twentieth-century Black American opera composer Harry Lawrence Freeman and symphonist Florence Price.

Singing Justice Collective member Tyrese Byrd explains his own musical training, in which the traditions of Black Song inspired and reinforced his exploration of classical music training and led to a professional career as a Black operatic tenor.

My mother describes me, from about age three, as an ambitious toddler fascinated by the piano. In church, I watched every move of Mrs. Ruby McCowan, our choir director and pianist at Mt. Herman Baptist church in Anderson, South Carolina. I was gripped by the way she played and sang and the sounds she could get from this mysterious instrument. Many family and church members retell the stories of my imitating her playing along the back of the pew in front of me. When we would return home, I would even crawl to the family piano with a rag on my head (representing her hair, of course), striving to be just like Mrs. Ruby. Since both of my parents and grandmother were all members of the choir, I was a sort of a choir groupie throughout my childhood before becoming a member myself around age twelve. Over time, my daily trips to the piano started to sound like the songs they would rehearse, and I began to pick up the licks and riffs that Mrs. Ruby would play frequently. Around the fourth grade, my father recognized my interest and placed me in formal piano lessons. I was reluctant to start because I felt I was already proficient enough to play the gospel music I was used to hearing in church. However, I quickly noticed the influence of my classical training on my gospel playing and vice versa. The same was true of my singing, as I started in the middle school chorus and eventually took classical voice lessons.

I found myself living in two worlds at the same time. When Mrs. Ruby passed away from cancer in my junior year of high school, I was a classical voice student

at a residential arts high school in South Carolina. I was a perfect fit to fill in her absences and eventually served full-time for five years as Music Director (a position also held by my great-grandfather) while I finished high school and pursued a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance with secondary piano lessons at Furman University. The skills from both my job at the church and my intense classical training have always complemented and strengthened the other. Being entrenched in two cultures has broadened my interpretation and understanding of music, from Benjamin Britten and Margaret Bonds to Twinkle Clark and Ricky Dillard.

While the Black church is one of the most important institutions of Black Space (see chapter 4), not every Black community member attends church or engages with music exclusively in the church. Many experienced music in secular places that church leaders often decried. They made music in taverns, bars, clubs, jook joints, and speakeasies, places where Black Song and music continued to develop, often providing musical momentum for dancing, socializing, and community building. These institutions appeared as Black populations increased in Northern and Southern towns. Such Black Spaces often evolved from plantation life, where Black people were accustomed to recreation that largely occurred in secret, away from white people. Katrina Hazzard-Donald traces their origins to before emancipation:

Precisely because gatherings of slaves and free people of African descent were illegal, slavery fostered Black social institutions that defied white control and thus helped create a recurrent pattern of covert social activity. During the post-Reconstruction era, African Americans saw a need—and an opportunity—to relocate the clandestine social activities and dances of the plantation days. Their freedom, the reorganized labor system, and their cultural past determined the shape of the first secular cultural institution to emerge after emancipation—the jook.²³

The jook was a Black Space that rejuvenated various Black cultural forms, such as the blues, rooted in the West African musical traditions that intertwined religious with secularized elements. Dancing associated with the jook, known as jookin', is directly connected with dance styles and movements from West African religious celebrations that involve joyous, ecstatic forms of worship illustrative of African rituals that survived among African Americans.²⁴ The musical practices that propelled jookin' were drawn from these rituals, which aim to inspire joy and ecstasy. As a result, the sacred and secular have often been intertwined in Black music-making. Jook, defined by Zora Neale Hurston as the word for “a Negro pleasure house,” became a private space for Black joy and ecstasy



Fig. 2.1. Jitterbugging in a jook joint for Black patrons near Clarksdale, Mississippi, November 1939.

Photo from Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC (LC-USF34-052596-D [P&P]) <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017801850/>

regardless of the physical space where the activity took place. Jooks could be created in barns, open-air spaces, praise houses, sugar refineries, and even jails.²⁵ Blues music developed and was taught in these spaces and became the foundation for one of the United States's greatest musical inventions—jazz.²⁶

On the Creative Relationship Between Black Space and Black Song

Black Space doesn't have to be a physical space. We include anything that psychologically, spiritually, or emotionally reaffirms Black humanity, challenges white supremacy, and offers peace for Black people, as Black Space.²⁷ Based on that understanding, many forms of art would qualify as Black Space, as venues where Black people find spiritual refuge, an outlet for the entire spectrum of human emotion, and a connection to their past, present, and future. Thus, Black Space can be found in Black Song. In this way, seemingly paradoxically, as Black Space can foster Black Song, Black Song expands Black Space.

Black Song creates and extends Black Space whenever Black musicians have the freedom to create, exploring their own expressive goals. This may include freedom from white- or European-derived or -controlled musical forms or structures. The Black musician, while performing Black Song, is often in the emotional service of Black listeners, expressing the feelings of other Black people in the community, whether real or anticipated.

Black Song created Black Space for the enslaved before emancipation. West African songs and forms that evolved, for example, into work songs and spirituals provided a lifeline to the strengths and rituals of the ancestors of enslaved African Americans.²⁸ An example of the continuation of these West African traditions can be seen in the ring shout, a music and dance practice among enslaved people.²⁹ While this Black Space was initially created as a metaphysical escape through the creation of song, the space could become a temporary physical space when people move together ritually in a circle of their peers. The Black Space created by Black Song could be passed from generation to generation via oral tradition. In many cases, no physical objects or materials were needed.

An important feature of the ring shout was that it could be established or dissolved at a moment's notice. Due to the threat of white surveillance and violence, the fact that the Black Space could disappear when the song stopped and revert to a white space again (from a camp meeting to a cotton field) was integral. This feature of Black Song, to create and dissolve Black Space in a fugitive way, has historically allowed for Black Song to serve as a means of resistance (see chapter 3).

Black Song can even seize space hostile to Black people and transform and maintain it as Black Space. Singer, activist, and musicologist Bernice Johnson Reagon explained this transformation beautifully, addressing her involvement with the civil rights movement:

Sound is a way to extend the territory you can affect. . . . Certainly the communal singing that people do together is a way of announcing that we're here. . . . Anybody who comes into that space, as long as you're singing, they cannot change the air in that space. The song will maintain the air as your territory. And I've seen meetings where a sheriff has walked into a mass meeting and established the air. . . . And they're taking pictures or taking names and you just know your job is in trouble. . . . The only way people could take the space back was by starting a song.³⁰

Johnson Reagon also referred to the activation of space via Black Song as a practice that she carried throughout her life: "Very seldom will I get up and not sing.

It's something about cleansing, or preparing, the air. Even if I start with a song and don't sing another, it's about grounding myself in that place."³¹

The Fisk Jubilee Singers also relied on songs to alter space. Formed in 1871 at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, this national and international touring group created dynamic, vibrant Black Spaces that audiences worldwide could enter. Even when people were new to the experience of hearing Black Song, the context and respect paid to Black musicians could incarnate a temporary Black Space that could have a lasting impact. In an era in which many white people's lessons about Black people came through blackface minstrelsy with its demeaning stereotypes, the Fisk Jubilee Singers provided a counter and humanizing understanding of Black people through song.

The relationship between Black music and Black Space is so strong that sometimes the former can create the latter without Black bodies in the room. In the early twentieth century Black music was disseminated worldwide in new technologies, offering new means and opportunities to create Black musical spaces, even in the absence of Black people. Music publishers turned ragtime into sheet music, bringing Black sound into many homes, including white homes. In the 1920s and 1930s, record companies recorded blues and ragtime and disseminated these recordings all over the world in the form of "race records," which were then broadcast on radio.³² This allowed Black Songs to traverse spaces where Black people were absent. Recordings offered non-Black audiences—many of whom didn't encounter African Americans in their daily lives—opportunities to hear Black music performed by Black artists. They could hear the musical features, such as a distinctive timbre, pitch slides, or improvisation, that were rarely captured by sheet music.

Do No Harm: Practicing Cultural Humility

Black Song should be approached in a respectful way that honors and builds on its traditions. That Black Song can be separated from Black people and from Black Spaces creates the potential for harm. When musicians and listeners fail to approach Black Song with care and respect, for example, it is very easy to move into a space of cultural appropriation. For performers, cultural appropriation refers to performing the cultural practices of another culture without proper acknowledgment or awareness of a practice's origins. Creators face increased risk in adopting or taking the cultural resources of others. Sociologist Jon Cruz refers to the divorce of music from its essential context and culture as "disengaged engagement," a broader idea that embraces listeners as well as performers.³³ Disengaged engagement is a practice in which people enjoy the cultural practices of others without considering the contexts or traditions of their creators.

The most obvious example of cultural appropriation and disengaged engagement with Black Song is the practice of blackface minstrelsy (see chapter 4). In this tradition, white people changed their physical appearance and invented mannerisms devoid of any direct engagement with the Black experience to pretend they were Black for comic effect, perpetuating stereotypes and mocking Black people. Blackface minstrelsy was one of the most widespread and popular forms of entertainment in the United States from the 1830s and well into the twentieth century. By co-opting an illusion of blackness for their own entertainment and profit, white Americans caused lasting harm. The most pernicious effect of minstrelsy was that performing a fabricated blackness obscured Black reality, replacing it with a dehumanizing racial fantasy.³⁴

With this knowledge in mind, we suggest approaching Black Song—especially for non-Black readers—on its own terms and with great sensitivity to this context and to underlying power imbalances. Medical professionals Melanie Tervalon and Jan Murray-García coined the term “cultural humility” for doctors working with patients from backgrounds different from their own, to encourage these doctors to treat their patients with respect and care and with attention to underlying systems of oppression.³⁵ This requires that medical practitioners let go of their assumptions about people who are different from themselves, to accept that they do not know everything about their patients’ health beliefs and life experiences, and to listen intently and learn about the practices and customs of their patients.

We recommend applying the same technique to music. In this, we build on the work of Singing Justice team member Caroline Helton, who is white, and her frequent collaborator Emery Stephens, a professor of voice, who is Black. For them, practicing cultural humility means “reflect[ing] on our background and the background of others while teaching, learning, conducting research, performing, and leading culturally relevant performances.”³⁶ Cultural humility can lead to rich insights for all.

Cultural humility looks different depending on who you are and how you make music. It requires you to consider that you may not have all the answers that connect music, such as Black Song, to its cultural context. Even if you have experience listening to a certain artist or musical style, there will be references or connections to shared cultural practices, to events or moments in history, or to other music or media that you are missing, but that a person from the in-group is more likely to understand. Cultural humility requires you to listen and to truly hear the input of others. Some of your preconceptions or ideas about music could be challenged by others. Cultural humility requires you to listen openly to people who have a different stake in a certain style of music and who might also have less power than you. Being able to listen, understand, and act on

good-faith criticism without becoming defensive or lashing out is key. As Helton and Stephens observe,

In many cases of establishing effective allyship, people may need to realize their unique privilege or how to use their influence to help others respectfully. The most challenging part of group discussions involves listening to others who have experienced bias, systemic racism, exclusion, and microaggressions. But since the positionality of allies emerges from membership in a privileged group, starting from this point of awareness makes it possible to establish a space in which to build trust and identify shared goals.³⁷

The big concern that many of us in Singing Justice share is that some non-Black people might feel a bit over-eager to visit a Black Space without understanding that it is a place of education, learning, joy, and restoration. We encourage readers to be aware of the risk of cultural appropriation and disengaged engagement with Black Song, so they don't cause harm. The best of intentions do not prevent one from causing harm inadvertently. Be aware of the reactions of others who might be suffering. We each enter Black Space with unique gifts to offer and needs to be met. A Black Space can be a healing space through the power of Black Song. Since everyone is at a different point in their own journey, the Black Space must be entered thoughtfully, with care, respect, and humility.

Jazz Studies and the Colonization of Black Space

What happens when Black Song is moved out of Black Space? In this final section, we explore jazz studies as a case study illustrating the potential pitfalls and harm of removing Black Song from the context and practices of Black Space. In the twentieth century, the popularity of jazz inspired the academy to acquire and colonize blues-based improvisatory music, redefining the spaces in which jazz is taught. From this, university jazz studies curricula emerged. In recent decades, many young jazz musicians in the United States learn the art primarily in school music programs with showcases in recital halls before quiet audiences. Jazz students learn notes and form, but they are taught little about the culture that created and sustained the music, informing its sound and performance. Also missing from the formal conservatory-style training in predominantly white institutions is the apprenticeship model that is the bedrock of jazz pedagogy in Black Space. While well-intentioned and often producing excellent musicians, many of these programs neglect the Black cultural heritage of jazz and take an approach to jazz education that is antithetical to the ways it is performed and taught in Black Spaces.

One result of jazz becoming an academic discipline is that it is routinely separated from its historical roots and presented simply as American, rather than specifically Black American. Ethnomusicologist Travis Jackson explains that since the early 1980s, jazz has been presented in ways that promoted both its essential “Americanness” and its supposed “universality”—meaning that it has been absorbed into the mainstream to such an extent that it is detached from its Black origins.³⁸ The other result is that jazz is frequently referred to as “America’s classical music.”³⁹ Jackson charges that musicologists generally speak of jazz in terms developed for European concert music by using meticulous transcriptions for analysis and paying obsessive attention to the details on recordings, absent a fuller understanding of live experience. He concludes that scholars portray jazz as a flawed form of classical music rather than as something vital on its own terms.⁴⁰

The study of jazz in conservatory settings also has an earlier historical precedent related to white musicians discovering this music and finding disproportionate success. The white “Original Dixieland Jazz Band” in 1917 gave many in the white public their first opportunity to hear jazz. Because they made the early jazz recordings that sold in the millions, they popularized the word “jazz” among white listeners.⁴¹ Early-twentieth-century corporate-sponsored radio broadcasts were racially structured, and white bands enjoyed well-paid, long-term contracts. In 1934, NBC offered white bandleader Benny Goodman’s band a regular slot on their national radio show *Let’s Dance*, passing over prominent Black bandleaders, including Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, and Jimmie Lunceford. Through Goodman, an excellent musician, many listeners came to know blues-based swing that originated from African American bands and composers through the vehicle of this white performer.⁴²

In response to this economic exploitation in which Black musicians faced discrimination, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie created a new style for small ensembles that couldn’t easily be copied—“bebop,” a breakneck blues-based improvisational style.⁴³ While musicians like Parker and Gillespie maintained the community-focused training practices of jam sessions, mainstream jazz purveyors continued to focus on the big-band sound performed by mostly white, conservatory-trained men. For them, jazz was more “American” than Black, and they came to value characteristics associated with classical music, including sight-reading charts, transcriptions, and auditions. In sum, mainstream jazz, with its association with big-band swing, was stripped of its Black aesthetic as it came to be designated an “American” national treasure.

Consequently, demand increased for jazz education outside of the Black social world of the club. The academy welcomed jazz, but only as it conformed to the institutionalized model of the conservatory, a model developed for a spe-

cific, narrow approach to studying and performing classical music. As educators transformed jazz into a legitimate college subject, they embraced a narrow definition of a single jazz style and related skills. This preferred academic jazz style became the big-band jazz ensemble, emphasizing audition and chair placement, sight reading, and transcription, all skills easily transferable from classical music education. American conservatories then promoted jazz as having what classical music has, which brought academic respect and financial support.⁴⁴ This effort advanced the cause of jazz education within the academy while omitting many unique characteristics that ran contrary to conservatory standards.

As jazz entered the conservatory, it lost most of its qualities related to how music education and music performance work within Black Space. African American music, drawing on its African roots, is a community practice that is intended to have an emotional or spiritual impact. If listeners are affected, they provide immediate feedback in the form of shouting or praise (a form of call-and-response) to encourage the performer. "For the African [and by extension the African American], the musical experience is by and large an emotional one: sounds, however beautiful, are meaningless if they do not . . . contribute to the expressive quality of the performance. That is, the display of emotions indicates that the musical performance has been experienced at the highest level."⁴⁵ Audience participation in the performance is part of the African American tradition. Eileen Southern similarly highlights the importance of all the people in this musical space in the era of enslavement, noting that

in the strict sense of the term there was no audience; there were only singers and nonsingers. The white listeners might sit quietly, showing their appreciation of a performance by facial expression and applause at appropriate times, but the slaves actively participated in the performance, not only by clapping and tapping, but also by constantly interjecting spoken or chanted words to reinforce the meaning of the text, such as "Yes, Lord," "O Lord," "I say now," and similar short phrases. The nature of these phrases depended upon the occasion.⁴⁶

Performance adhering to these principles forms the Black folk music tradition, including spirituals, blues, gospel, jazz, rock, R&B, soul, and hip-hop. For example, in jazz, when standard repertoire is performed, songs are never played the exact same way because of the custom of improvisation inherent in Black folk music forms.⁴⁷ Legendary trumpeter Miles Davis was known for reprimanding members of his band who might have played the same jazz licks or riffs that they had performed in rehearsals. He stressed creativity in improvisation. Blues-

based jazz, rarely executed in the same way twice, demonstrates that jazz is truly a descendant of African musical tradition.

Improvisation should reflect how one feels in the moment. Musicologist Mellonee Burnim observes that use of the body in performance is also vital to improvisation, as “performance in Black culture symbolized vitality, a sense of aliveness,” and that performers “must be overtly demonstrative if a Black audience is to be convinced.”⁴⁸ This use of the body represents Black conceptions of music as one with song and dance. Similarly, it demonstrates the importance of viewing music as something done with other people, and the history and traditions as something kept and passed on by *doing* rather than by *reading*. As Ben Sidran observes, “the literate man stores information through writing; the oral man stores information through physical assimilation; he becomes the information.”⁴⁹

Jazz education has historically been a community-based practice. Prior to the 1960s, most jazz musicians developed their improvisational skills in largely informal environments, places where the music was lived and performed, such as nightclubs, bars, dancehalls, and even musicians’ homes. It was in these spaces that young musicians learned from older, experienced musicians and a network of peers. White musicians who wanted to learn jazz this way could also join these Black Spaces. The experienced or elder jazz musician is thus an adapted griot, who carries the information and traditions necessary to teach an aspiring musician how to *perform*, to connect with a listener through personal expression, in order to take the audience to a place of ecstasy or spiritual release. Each musician trained in Black folk music traditions is expected to be a griot, regardless of race or gender, and is tasked with memorizing not just songs, but rhythms, chord progressions, and sounds from key recordings or past performances that are notable within the Black community.

Singing Justice member Traci Lombré shares her observation of the virtues of the Black performance and community-based music training.

It is the elder or peer relationship that fosters learning on how to deliver a performance. This training is often conducted during a performance on the band stand, perhaps at a jam session or in church during service, with an audience present who provides immediate encouragement or feedback to the performer in training. The performer in training is often coached during the performance by their peer or elder mentor on how to tap into their state of flow to make their performance personal, while being mindful of the backing band and their playing. The elder will provide tips on how to improve on self-confidence, technique, tone, timbre, tempo or dynamics to make for a more engaging performance for both the audience and fel-

low musicians on the bandstand. In short, the elder is teaching the aspiring musician professionalism and how to communicate their emotions musically, rather than just to play notes. In this musical tradition under the watchful eye of elders, musicians are taught to get to the heart of their emotions and get them out into the atmosphere through their playing. Performing this way serves as a release for the performer and the audience members who can identify with that particular emotion.

The jam session, an important part of community training in the oral tradition, is used to refine presentation in the Black aesthetic. Jam sessions developed the skills and character necessary to succeed as a jazz musician and bandleader in tough, competitive, unpredictable environments. By performing impromptu and by observing the musician elders as they perform with other musicians, one acquires the skills to perform music at peak emotional involvement and continue the process of spontaneous composition, all components of the Black aesthetic that distinguish Black music from most of the Western tradition.⁵⁰ It is often through audience feedback during a jam session performance that one also learns whether or not one has stage presence. Ben Sidran adds that stage presence “accounts for the impact of the black personality on the music industry.”⁵¹ This is not taught in conservatory-based jazz programs, yet it is essential for employment in the jazz world.

Elder bandleaders understand that their role as community leaders is to welcome anyone who is serious about learning the music, regardless of race or gender. Musicians who choose to be trained in this mainly all-Black space in blues-based jazz become “cats,” late-night performers who acquire the Black performance aesthetic. Cats adopt the family structure of the band, respect the African American experience at the root of the music, honor their jazz elders and peers, and commit to membership in a vast community and employment network and thus accept the responsibility to pass their knowledge on to others. Proficiency on an instrument is not the sole basis for deciding to hire or recommend a student for employment; elders mostly consider emotional maturity, professionalism, and the ability to get along with others and work effectively in unpredictable circumstances, which can happen often in a jazz performance. Peer relationships are also important, as peers recommend each other when they need someone to fill in for them on gigs they can’t take. Spending time with other musicians in a social-learning session through peer and mentor interaction is where one cultivates the respect for the music, its culture, and the ability to express oneself, which leads to wider performance opportunities.

These dynamics of jazz were largely lost when training moved out of Black Spaces. Scholar Joshua Renick, referencing jazz scholar David Aké, states,

"Today, jazz pedagogy remains 'decidedly classically based,' a far cry from its historical antecedent. No longer are notions of self-discovery, associated living, communicated experience, and improvisation at its philosophical center."⁵² The student body makeup of conservatory-based jazz education programs is mostly white and suburban, from school systems with generously funded K-12 musical training programs, where they acquire each of the valued conservatory skills.

Author and musician Eitan Y. Wilf has surveyed the efficacy of academic jazz programs. He reiterated that jazz for Black musicians was anti-establishment music, born on the streets and in clubs in Black communities. Because conservatory-trained students have often been isolated from both the Black performance culture inherent in blues-based jazz and the clubs that prepare them for a performance career, they prefer to seek teaching jobs rather than performance opportunities. According to Wilf, "thousands of students still enlist in jazz schools annually, but most of them do not necessarily hope to secure a steady performance career. Rather, they seek to become educators or to find some other form of employment within the music world or affiliated industries. This applies to the best of the students, too."⁵³ He adds that students are not only stripped of their ability to use the process of jazz to express themselves individually, but they are removed from acquiring the skills to even make a living in jazz. This institutional jazz culture conditions students to accept that they are not likely to gain self-sustaining employment as jazz musicians.⁵⁴ This attitude is very different from that of the community-trained jazz musician, who understands the music's professional and cultural etiquette and is acclimated to the nightclub environment where performance opportunities are usually secured.

A majority of those trained in conservatories rarely earn positions with well-known jazz groups or become members of the major jazz club or festival scene. Instead, those opportunities go to musicians with whom the bandleaders have a relationship or connection, regardless of race or gender. Musicians who have previously come through the community-based jazz tradition usually hire through the same channels, because they believe in how that training process tests and screens young players to be able to handle the demands of serious jazz performance.

As a result, students who are heritage learners of jazz (i.e., learning in jam sessions or similar environments) arrive at the conservatory as professionals, yet are quickly alienated by the students who do not have that experience and then act to establish "patriarchy" in jazz studies, establishing themselves as experts in how the music should be taught and who has access.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, these professional musicians are then made to feel like "ghetto" intruders, regardless of race or gender, for having gained significant small ensemble experience in urban clubs rather than from a school big-band program or elite extracurricular

programs. In fact, top jazz programs have difficulty recruiting students of color and retaining those who have learned jazz in the community tradition. Hence, the conservatory becomes a new space for jazz education that disassociates from the people and culture of the Black Space, blues-based jazz tradition.

It is not uncommon to see aspiring Black Space-trained high school jazz musicians be overlooked for top school bands at state and national jazz competitions. While they have been working as professionals who sight-read, master their instruments, and captivate an audience during performance, in competition the emphasis is on sight-reading charts. These spots traditionally go to young, white male suburban musicians who through their training demonstrate extraordinary sight-reading skills with technical proficiency, but their performances are often mechanical or emotionless.⁵⁶ The danger for jazz and its legacy, notes Wilf, is that it will die at the university, where it has become disconnected from its traditions. That disconnection is a result of its cultural appropriation in predominately white institutions.

While many white jazz musicians and listeners have approached the genre and jazz spaces respectfully, many have no knowledge of or interest in the music's foundations in Black Space and Black Song. Our goal is to encourage the reader to pursue the maintenance of vibrant musical communities and spaces. This requires respectful, curious, and humble engagement with music and the people who make and enjoy it.

From the beginning, Black Song was a necessary means of creating a space of Black respite and free expression, and conversely Black Space has long nurtured the creation of Black Song. Black Song and Black Space together have asserted Black humanity where and when it was denied. That function of Black Song has persisted long after emancipation at least in part because Black humanity and freedom continued to be circumscribed through Jim Crow laws and discriminatory practices. Furthermore, into the present, in our educational systems the gifts of Black Song are often absorbed while its origins are forgotten. However, Black Song remains a powerful tool for creating and maintaining Black Space for all who wish to share it respectfully, celebrating its beauty with Black Americans and listening to the messages that Black Song conveys.

3: Black Song as Protest and Resistance

Key Takeaways

- At least since the days of slavery, music as protest has been inextricably woven into the fabric of Black American music.
- Sometimes, such as when Black people have been pressed to sing and dance for white audiences, music has been a site for trauma and exploitation.
- Black Song has challenged white supremacy by affirming and celebrating Black humanity and bringing Black people together in communion.
- Sometimes protest messages have been hidden or coded in Black Song.
- Black Song has also supported direct political action.

In the wake of the 2020 murders of George Floyd and other Black individuals, Jon Batiste's song "WE ARE" reminded Black people of their music and community as a continual source of joy, talent, beauty, and strength. Its music video features looping scenes from 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in New York City, where Batiste mobilized musicians in support.¹ The song employs multiple voices to deliver its message: a gospel soloist, a children's choir, and Batiste's own St. Augustine High School Marching Band. Together, they represent common experiences of Black community music-making that can be found in almost any American city. "WE ARE" presents the sounds from the spaces where Batiste learned to make music growing up in New Orleans. Lyrics such as "The ghetto is full of stars / Watch them shine from afar / On days when it's hard" and "Nana knows how to sing / And soothes us all" capture this sense of community and convey a message about the worth of Black life. The chorus of the song features many voices reiterating the core message, repeating the word "we" for emphasis.

We are, We are, We are, We are the golden ones.
 We are, We are, We are, We are the chosen ones. . . .
 We're never alone, no, no.
 We're never alone, no, no.²

"WE ARE" is life affirming, joyful, and comforting; it is at the same time a song of protest and resistance calling for political engagement, especially when sung to support a larger social movement. Batiste unites emotions and actions in a song. In this regard, "WE ARE" follows a long tradition in which protest, resistance, and Black humanity are claimed by Black Song.

Coming Together and Claiming Humanity

Black Song has always been potent and political. At least since the days of racialized chattel slavery, protest has been inextricably woven into Black American music. Slavery persisted in part because many people convinced themselves that the practice was not barbaric, because enslaved people were not fully human and thus didn't deserve the same full human rights bestowed on white people. Dehumanizing enslaved people became a core strategy in the construction of race and racism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a crucial tool in maintaining the slave system that underpinned economies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.³ Through Black Song, Black people not only protested slavery, they challenged the dehumanizing beliefs used to justify it.

Enslaved African and African-descended people built on the musical practices of Africa. This music was a functional accompaniment to everyday life. Yet new song styles developed within the context of slavery, songs that affirmed the humanity of enslaved people and helped build a sense of community. Music documented enslaved lives and expressed hopes and fears. Spirituals, including "sorrow songs" (as sociologist and historian W. E. B. Du Bois called many of them), helped enslaved people process and explain their captivity.⁴ Spirituals are religious songs based on themes of hope, faith, and freedom. Their lyrics largely derived from biblical stories and resonated with the lived experience of the enslaved, encompassing themes such as loss of family, morality for the community, and triumph. Spirituals focusing on biblical stories about the exodus from Egypt ("Go Down Moses") or getting to the promised land ("Steal Away to Jesus") evoked direct calls for freedom, abolition, and escape.⁵ The lyrics of other spirituals document the experiences of slavery in a poignant and heartbreaking way, such as "Watch and Pray," which uses a cooperative call-and-response style. For example, in the first stanza, a child asks, "Mama, is massa goin' to sell us

tomorrow?” followed by a response from the mother, “Yes, yes, yes. / Oh, watch and pray.” “Watch and pray” repeats at the end of each stanza.

“Watch and Pray” (1972)

Spiritual by Undine Smith Moore (1904–1989)

Spirituals have remained an important touchstone and source of inspiration for Black musicians through the twentieth century. “Watch and Pray” is an emotionally moving spiritual most famously arranged by Black composer Undine Smith Moore in 1972.⁶ This concert spiritual for voice and piano was written for soprano Camilla Williams “with love and pride in her career.”⁷ By the 1970s, Williams was already regarded as one of the groundbreakers for Black opera singers across the globe. At her 1946 debut as Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* at the New York City Opera, she was the first Black singer to have a regular contract with a major opera company, and she was the first to sing a major role at the Vienna State Opera. She had also been a student of Undine Smith Moore at Virginia State College (now Virginia State University).⁸ Therefore, from an aesthetic point of view, the musical arrangement takes advantage of the refined, soaring quality of Williams’s soprano voice with a relatively sparse yet thoughtful piano accompaniment that underlines the raw simplicity of the text, characteristic of Moore’s songs and spirituals.

Mama, is massa goin’ to sell us tomorrow?

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, watch and pray.

Is he a goin’ to sell us down to Georgia?

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, watch and pray.

Oh Mama, don’t you grieve after me.

Oh, watch and pray.

The directness of the child asking the mother in the first stanza, “Is massa goin’ to sell us tomorrow?” is met with a response from the mother of “yes, yes, yes.” As the intensity builds with repetitions of the text, it leads to a climactic

moment as the mother lets out a visceral moan on “Oh” before advising, “watch and pray.” In the second stanza, when the child asks if they would be sold down to Georgia—an awful plight, given the understood harsher treatment of slaves in the Deep South—the mother cannot even answer after the child’s anxious pleas. Finally, the child understands and comforts the mother, asking her not to grieve for the mutual loss they are about to suffer. Moore’s arrangement of this spiritual provides a clear and painful connection for modern performers and audiences to consider the horrific experiences of enslaved people.

Music could also be used to facilitate everyday tasks. Work songs such as “Oh Lawdy Pick a Bale of Cotton” accompanied repetitive tasks such as picking cotton, shucking corn, and laying railroad tracks. Such songs layered call-and-response structures onto the rhythms of the task.⁹ Workers used these songs to coordinate their labor, stave off boredom, monitor one another’s well-being, and—presumably with subtle variations—alert one another to the arrival of overseers or outsiders. This music helped Black people form communities, document and endure the horrors of daily life, and push back against slavery. Born of the early history of the United States, this music became core to its musical culture.

Firsthand accounts make clear that white audiences were fascinated by the songs of enslaved people and that enslaved people were aware that white people were watching and listening. Perhaps this obsession of white listeners came from hearing artistic and human expression in the music. The adept artistry and powerful emotions of enslaved people must have created tension with white observers, who were made to wrestle—consciously or not—with the undeniable humanity revealed through music. Black Song undercuts any belief that enslaved people were less than human. Such cognitive dissonance led to erratic and unpredictable responses to Black Song by white listeners.

White listeners were never a neutral presence, and the system of slavery demanded that all white people reinforce racial hierarchy.¹⁰ The threat of violence was always present—explicitly or implicitly—for any enslaved person who refused a request from a white person. White listeners might appreciate the music, censor it, or demand that the musician replicate it for their entertainment. Examples of curious white audiences observing enslaved musical gatherings at the Congo Square in Louisiana sit alongside countless accounts of enslavers prohibiting songs that they found disagreeable or subversive. Enslavers commonly required enslaved people to perform for guests, as a demonstration of the enslaver’s wealth. Enslavers might similarly demand that their “prop-

erty” dance or sing on the auction block to showcase their vigor and skill and thus raise the price received in sale.¹¹ Overseers often forced enslaved people in the fields to sing work songs, which some then took as proof that enslaved people were happy with their lot. Thus, music-making and dancing became another form of labor and a potential source of trauma for Black people. John Brown, a Black man who escaped slavery, recounted an experience in the book *Slave Life in Georgia* that reveals the trauma in these musical experiences.

After dinner, we were compelled to walk, dance, and kick about in the yard for exercise; and Bob, who had a fiddle, used to play jigs for us to dance to. If we did not dance to his fiddle, we used to have to do so to his whip, so no wonder we used our legs handsomely, though the music was none of the best.¹²

As Brown’s reflection underscores, dancing and working were closely related, with each serving the interests of white people. The formerly enslaved abolitionist Frederick Douglass cut to the heart of this tension in his 1845 autobiography.

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.¹³

Douglass’s observation highlights both the theme of sorrow in Black Song and the long-recurring theme of misunderstanding by some audiences of Black Song.

For enslaved people, music could also be a tool of survival and resistance. The violinist Solomon Northup was drugged, kidnapped, and sold into slavery in 1841. After securing his freedom, he wrote in his autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*, that his violin had been a lifeline and survival tool.

Alas! Had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses—relieved me of many days’ labor in the field—supplied me with conveniences for my cabin, pipes, tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes. . . . It was my companion—the friend of my bosom—triumphing loudly when I was joyful, and uttering its soft, melodious consolations when I was sad. Often, at midnight, when sleep had fled affrighted from the cabin, and my soul was disturbed and troubled with the contemplation of my fate, it would sing me a song of peace.¹⁴

Northrup shows how music could be a tool to steal some autonomy for enslaved people. His violin allowed him to earn money. It also affirmed his humanity against a continual stream of large and small messages that he was less than human. For this free man who had been sold into bondage, music—his music—let him express his humanity in both joy and sadness.

Black music-making could also be subversive in its use of meanings hidden from white understanding and surveillance. The spiritual “Wade in the Water” is a good example. On the surface, one might assume that this song references a baptism. For enslaved people, however, it offered a lesson for escape. Wading in the water, such as in a creek or river, obscured scents and footprints, making tracking more difficult. Such meanings could be hidden from enslavers, who might only hear the surface-level meaning.¹⁵ In a world of continual surveillance, a coded musical message became an act of resistance, hope, and possibly survival.

Political and social systems that oppressed Black Americans did not end with slavery. After emancipation, as Black Americans explored the meaning of freedom, debates about Black citizenship remained central in American politics. Unfortunately, by the 1890s it had become clear that those in power and the majority of white people would not honor the promises of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Instead, Jim Crow relegated Black Americans to second-class citizenship marked by disfranchisement, segregation, discrimination, and other forms of injustice and violence.¹⁶

In response, building on inherited methods of resistance, Black Americans developed strategies to educate young Black people to metaphorically escape anti-Black domination. Historian Jarvis R. Givens refers to this educational strategy as “fugitive pedagogy.”¹⁷ Instructors, some of whom had escaped from slavery themselves, taught students from materials hidden from those in power, including eventually the work of Carter G. Woodson, who encouraged Black Americans to learn and celebrate their rich, proud African past.¹⁸ From Black teachers, Black students learned about Black history and prominent Black figures, past and present. Black music further served to teach emotional truths about the past.

Black educators taught the necessary “hidden transcripts,” or the unwritten rules, to navigate a white world while Black.¹⁹ They also inducted their students into the practice of defiance while publicly performing deference to oppressive white systems. Described by African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar as “wearing the mask,” this cultural phenomenon of performing obedience while practicing defiance united the community.²⁰ While wearing the mask was intended to provide psychological protection (a reminder that they were only

pretending to play a role as inferior), it also was a lesson in physical safety and literally learning how to survive in a Jim Crow world.²¹ Most teachers could not express direct forms of protest. However, by teaching resistance tactics and instilling ideals of freedom and equal rights, they laid the groundwork for their students both to survive and to lead future protest movements.

It is productive to think of Black Song as nearly always engaged in resistance to white supremacy. White supremacy works to diminish the basic humanity of Black people, so any act that asserts humanity resists and subverts white supremacy. In this way, art-making is resistance; joy can be resistance, and so can sadness and consolation. Singing can be resistance. Dancing can be resistance. It can also be helpful to think of Black Song and protest as existing on a spectrum between direct action and fugitive symbolism. On that spectrum reside multiple layers of meaning that are always being transformed, subverted, and recontextualized to signal meanings both historic and new from one individual to another and across groups and time.

Protest in Black Song operates on many levels and takes on varied appearances based on the contexts in which it is activated. Readers may be familiar with songs of direct political protest, such as the collective anthems “This Little Light of Mine” or “We Shall Overcome,” which featured prominently in the soundscape of US civil rights protests in the 1950s and 1960s.²² Both songs encouraged activists to come together, draw strength from one another, and envision triumph. Organizing people for political action was one way that Black Song supported protest and resistance. But explicit protest was not the only way—as history shows—that Black Americans used music to resist white supremacy.

Black Song as Everyday Resistance

Black music’s work as resistance extends beyond the songs of street protests into routines of daily life. In Black Song, communities have built techniques to undermine the distortions and misconceptions of white supremacy. Songwriters, composers, performers, and even everyday listeners demonstrate their humanity through music. Resistance doesn’t have to be overtly political or fueled by righteous anger, although these can be useful strategies and motivating forces.

Consider, for example, Nina Simone’s “Ain’t Got No—I Got Life” (1968), a mash-up of two songs from the musical *Hair*.²³ In the first half of the mash-up, “Ain’t Got No,” the narrator declares the things she doesn’t have—no home, shoes, money, father, mother, country, god, etc. In the musical, the absence of these things conveys the marginalization and isolation of young people within

the 1960s counterculture movement. In Simone's voice, however, it conjures ideas about race, poverty, and all forms of humanity that Jim Crow denied. In a bridge connecting these songs, Simone asks, "Why am I alive anyway? What have I got / nobody can take away?" She then answers that she has her head, brain, eyes, mouth, heart, soul, sex, arms, feet, liver, blood, and various other body parts and human attributes. Ultimately, she's "got life," and she's got her "freedom." The song is an affirming, positive embrace of life's joy and a powerful response to alienation and trauma. Importantly, while Simone didn't write either source song, through her voice and the combination, she made a new song, and she made it her own.²⁴ There is also a message in the song's context. The Black Power movement of the late 1960s celebrated Black people and Blackness, as in the rallying cries, "Black is Beautiful," and James Brown's powerful line, "I'm Black and I'm Proud."²⁵ Her song reinforced these themes.

In a world that fears groups of Black people gathering, coming together is also an act of resistance. In the 1995 documentary, *Black Is . . . Black Ain't*, for example, feminist social critic and writer bell hooks suggested that the process of gathering creates a space for communion. For hooks, communion does not mean denying or ignoring differences; instead, it serves as a space for different people to come together and discuss their varied experiences, ideas, and perspectives. Such communal spaces are important sites of resistance to white supremacy.²⁶

Black Song can be one of these spaces of communion. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" fulfills that role. Written around 1900, at a time when Black codes and the fiction of "separate but equal" eroded the rights Black Americans had gained following the Civil War, the song served as a carrier of history, Black trauma, and especially determination and hope. It was shared and performed less through official music publications than in "copies of the words pasted in the backs of hymnals and the songbooks used in church Sunday schools, YMCA branches, and similar institutions." It was only later that it became an official song of the NAACP.²⁷ (See the song biography in chapter 1.)

Song as a source of communion can also be seen as a response to the violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s, related to a war abroad and turmoil at home. When Marvin Gaye recorded "What's Going On" in 1970, Americans were increasingly feeling uneasy about the Vietnam War, while protesters in the streets were met with violence and arrests by the police.²⁸ Gaye references these events in the lyrics: "There's far too many of you dying" and "Don't punish me with brutality." He sings that "War is not the answer," while also subtly telling the listener that the answer to the violence and chaos of the moment is love, family, and community.

“What’s Going On” (1970)

Lyrics by Al Cleveland (1930–1996), Renaldo Benson (1936–2005), and Marvin Gaye (1939–1984)

Music by Marvin Gaye

On May 15, 1969, in Berkeley, California, in what would become known as “Bloody Thursday,” a vacant lot became the site of a confrontation between the police and a group of protesters. Activists had taken control of the lot, dubbed “People’s Park,” seeking to convert it into a park and community garden. The clash left one individual dead and another permanently blinded.²⁹ Renaldo “Obie” Benson, a member of a hugely successful Motown quartet, the Four Tops, witnessed part of this chaotic scene. Disturbed by what he saw, he shared the experience with Motown songwriter Al Cleveland and with Marvin Gaye. Together they then wrote “What’s Going On,” the title track of Gaye’s 1971 album, widely considered one of the greatest albums of all time.³⁰

“What’s Going On” opens with casual conversation and overlapping voices. The listener can hear phrases such as “Hey, what’s happening?” “Brother, what’s up?” “This is a groovy party, man.” As the music begins, the voices fade. The lyrics conjure both the protest and violence of the 1960s, from picket lines and picket signs to the phrase “don’t punish me with brutality.” Those references could have been about the Berkeley confrontation and any number of responses to antiwar activists, civil rights activists, feminists, gay rights advocates, and others. The lyrics also reference the war in Vietnam in the line “We don’t need to escalate, you see, war is not the answer.” For the American public, the verb “escalate” had come to be closely associated with how they learned about the nation’s growing involvement in the war. Another line evokes the counterculture: “who are they to judge us, simply because our hair is long.” For men, short hair had come to symbolize a masculinity representative of “traditional” values and patriarchy while long hair had become a prominent feature of a cultural rebellion. Thus, even as this song was inspired by “Bloody Thursday,” it was also a commentary on the political and cultural tensions of the entire decade of the 1960s.

Alongside this critique of “what’s going on,” the song presents an alternative path forward. Three times Gaye mentions “love,” including in the lines “a way to bring some loving here today,” and “only love can conquer hate.” He also uses the language of family: “Mother, mother, there’s too many of you crying,” “Father, father, we don’t need to escalate,” and “Brother, brother, brother, there’s too many of you dying.” Each chorus responds with a reference to “sister” or

“brother.” Thus, interspersed with descriptions of violence and tension are subtle allusions to love and family, presented perhaps as a salve or solution to the turmoil of the 1960s.

Midway through and at the end of the song, there is a return to background conversation underneath the music, including laughter and a suggestion to get the football.³¹ It is the kind of relaxed exchange one might encounter with friends and family having a picnic in a park. Thus, a song inspired by brutality in one park returns us to perhaps another park that is a site of love, community, and family. The song itself holds these concerns about the violence alongside the peacefulness of people coming together, celebrating life and each other. It offers a unique opportunity to consider the ways in which the 1960s were a time of anxiety, division, and destruction, as well as hope, optimism, and love.

More recently, hip-hop has been an important vehicle for Black resistance to white supremacy and the assertion of Black humanity. Often demonized and misunderstood in popular culture and American political conversations, hip-hop music and its artists have nonetheless used the genre as a site of communion. Unsurprisingly, the communities of people who make hip-hop music carry all the contradictions and messiness that attend any collection of people with varied perspectives, ideas, ideologies, and goals. The best hip-hop—like the best of any music—is imbued with the aspirations, compassion, ideas, and limitations (including prejudices) of its creators. Just as blues music captured the complexities of Black working-class life in an earlier generation, hip-hop has performed a similar role in the post-civil rights era.³² This complexity resonates in songs such as “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” by the Geto Boys.³³ This song, a typical “gangsta rap” of the 1990s, combines ostentatious bragging, a positive vision of helping the poor, misogynistic visions of masculinity, and a trenchant critique of white political leaders.

“Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” (1992)

Written and recorded by the Geto Boys

The song “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” by the Houston rap trio Geto Boys is an excellent example of music resisting negative stereotypes, critiquing politicians, and grappling with complex ideas in messy and sophisticated ways.

The Geto Boys formed in the 1980s in Houston, Texas, consisting of Scarface (Brad Terrence Jordan), Willie D (William James Dennis), and Bushwick Bill (Richard William Stephen Shaw). Achieving their greatest fame in the early 1990s at the vanguard of what became known as gangsta rap, their music spoke to the concerns of young Black teenagers and adults primarily living in urban neighborhoods.³⁴ For these listeners, gangs and gangsters were familiar sights, and “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” explores what it means to be a gangster.

The idea of the gangster has a long history in the United States, encompassing outlaws (Bonnie and Clyde) and criminal operators (Al Capone). The concept of the street gang and the gangsta emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The exodus of white people from city centers dramatically reduced tax revenue and resources for public services in cities. Local governments, led primarily by white political leaders, also diverted resources away from Black neighborhoods, and local police departments frequently over-policed Black neighborhoods and terrorized residents. These developments left many Black Americans living in relatively poor neighborhoods with few social services and a distrust of the local police. Street gangs emerged in response, to fill some of these gaps. Some ran protection rackets, protecting members from the police or other gangs; some promoted Black-led and Black-only institutions. By the 1980s, street gangs were a source of national attention and sensationalized representations in news and film.³⁵

In “Damn, It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta,” the Geto Boys play with the varied meanings of the word “gangster.” In the second verse, Bushwick Bill lays out a positive definition of gangster. He uses the cachet of coolness associated with the concept to encourage the listener to support the most vulnerable within their community. According to Bushwick Bill, a real gangster “feed[s] the poor” and is “living for the Lord.” Bushwick Bill also demonizes those things that he sees as not manly (“wannabe, gonna be, cocksucking, pussy-eating pranksters”), and thus his definition is misogynistic and homophobic.³⁶ However, in this verse, he also sets real, productive gangsters like himself apart from selfish, bragging, or unintelligent people.

The fourth verse offers a different kind of gangster. The Geto Boys’ producer, J. Prince, adopts the Texas accent and mannerisms of then-President George H. W. Bush to deliver a message about the ways politicians have harmed Black people. The music video includes a montage of George H. W. Bush with his immediate predecessors, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, as well as what appears to be an African American in a suit behind Bush at a press conference.³⁷ These images pair with the lyrics to implicate Bush, Reagan, Carter, and anybody who works with or for them (including other African Americans) in exploiting Black

communities. Referencing the conspiracy theory that the US federal government was involved in drugs being distributed to poor Black communities and criticizing President Bush for sending troops to fight the Gulf War, the lyrics directly implicate prominent white political figures as gangsters perpetuating violence that harms Black communities.

The history of this song is further complicated by its subsequent appearance in various media. “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” was not a major hit. Its cultural presence was relatively limited until it was featured in Mike Judge’s 1999 comedy film *Office Space*. Here, the song primarily acts as an ironic juxtaposition for the antics of the film’s white protagonists. This movie and later uses of the song (including by conservative politician Ted Cruz in a 2016 campaign ad) rely on the power of musical associations of gangsta rap—particularly for white people—with both coolness and lawlessness to make this point.³⁸

The history of this song illustrates hip-hop’s complexity as music and its complicated place in American culture. It shows how this music can combine scathing social commentary, tongue-in-cheek humor, and regressive ideas about gender in the context of Black Song. Its later uses also reveal how listeners outside the Black community continue to find themselves drawn to the style and sound of hip-hop while often stripping it of relevant context and nuance.

Black artists who center fugitive methods of music creation—expressing layered messages through culturally encoded symbols and signs—join a tradition of Black musical protest. An example of this technique is “Long John Blues,” written by Tommy George and first released and performed by Dinah Washington in 1949.³⁹ While her message of sexual passion and vibrant female desire is hidden in plain sight and perhaps veiled in humor, it perpetuates a tradition of layered meaning. It also draws on an earlier tradition among Black women blues singers who sang openly about sex and sexual desire, challenging mainstream and even elite Black beliefs that those feelings should be confined to private spaces.⁴⁰ Like coded meanings in the blues, Washington’s rendition of the song trains listeners to listen for secondary meanings in Black Song and culture generally. Her use of coded meanings ensures that this way of knowing how to hear Black Song continues to the next generation.

Another example is in African American composer Robert Owens’s song “Die Nacht.” Born in Texas but later residing in Germany, in 1998 Owens set Joseph von Eichendorff’s poem “Die Nacht” as one song in his “Drei Lieder für Mezzo.”⁴¹ Eichendorff’s text, first published in 1834, is a romantic evocation of

the poet's yearning for love. It had been set to music previously by composers including Fanny Hensel and Hugo Wolf, and it ostensibly has nothing to do with the Black American experience. Yet one wonders what the lyric meant to Owens, what "thoughts of dreams" might have meant to him in the context of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream. Regardless, the impulse of a Black American man living in Germany to compose a song to be judged alongside works by masters of the genre, such as Wolf, was an act of defiance and belonging. Owens's song is a claim to full humanity, a demonstration of creative power, and a counter to the notion that Black composers are anything less than fully human.

The denial of Black history, specifically the suppression or discounting of Black stories, is another way white supremacy holds Black humanity in check. Black musicians push against this by telling Black stories. This music serves as a repository of Black knowledge and a living cultural archive. Musicians convey different modes of memory and historical reconstruction in Black Song. These can include direct storytelling, in a ballad such as "John Henry," which celebrates an African American free man and railroad worker; indirect symbolism, as the space of darkness and night imbues Owens's 1998 setting of Eichen-dorff's 1834 poem "Die Nacht"; and cultural preservation, as found in generations of Black musical traditions, such as the spiritual.

The practice of sampling may be the most direct example of a song serving as a cultural archive. Sampling is the process by which a musician transfers an excerpt of recorded sound from its original context to another, duplicating and incorporating it into a new musical work. By using samples, the past is changed, adapted, and moved into a new context. In the process, the past is remade, reauthored, as part of a new work and artistic vision. For example, hip-hop producer Dr. Dre is known for his distinctive sampling methods. He began sampling soul, R&B, and funk records from his mother's music collection. Through his work, the Black musical past and its contexts, specifically his mother's musical archive, were propelled into the consciousness of a new generation.

Singing Justice Collective member Samantha Williams recounts a related experience:

One of my favorite childhood memories is listening to the radio in the car with my mom. She would get such joy from hearing a song on the radio and exclaiming whenever she noticed a clever use of sampling. She would then quiz me on whether I knew the original song being sampled and would playfully reprimand herself for failing as a mother if I didn't know my own history. These moments were always an opportunity for my mom to share knowledge of the Black past—of musicians from past generations, the music they left behind, and how it was still relevant to

my daily life. I particularly remember my mother's excitement as we listened to Will Smith's "Men in Black" from 1997 which samples "Forget Me Nots" by Patrice Rushen from 1982. We sat and listened to Rushen's song and discussed the ingenuity of Will Smith referencing this song about not being forgotten in his new song about the "Men in Black" making people forget what they had seen.

In this way, Black musicians continue the work of a fugitive pedagogy, creating a historical archive for the next generation, an archive that is sung aloud and yet hidden in the mix.

Black Song as Political Action

When Black Song enacts direct political action, its creators must navigate the very oppressive systems they seek to subvert. White systems of Black suppression are reinforced by the status quo. In a capitalist society, commercialism dictates dissemination. Protecting profit creates a profound investment in censoring messages considered threatening to the status quo. Political and cultural theorist Theodor Adorno similarly wrote about the propensity for popular music to breed inaction. In his conception, the progressive identity of the "culture industry" is a mirage. For Adorno, song serves as a kind of pressure-release valve in which protest is expressed and contained at the same time. The culture industry, he argued, presented only a watered-down, nonthreatening pseudo-rebellion that, in reality, encouraged only contentment and inaction.⁴² While recognizing the limits of speaking out against the system from within it, we nevertheless find that Black popular music can overtly be a powerful force undermining white supremacy.

Music enables political action in multiple ways. Some musicians have responded to political injustice in the moment by creating lyrics or sounds that challenge white supremacy explicitly. Singer and pianist Nina Simone's 1964 song "Mississippi Goddam" is one such response. Simone reacted directly to the injustices and violence of the mid-1960s with a song that excoriated racial violence, labor exploitation, and segregation in the South. Simone's direct style and complex lyrics named and called out injustice. She also criticized moderates—the same so-called "white moderates" that Martin Luther King Jr. addressed in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"—who pleaded for movement activists to "go slow" and wait for more gradual change.⁴³

“Mississippi Goddam” (1964)

Lyrics and music by Nina Simone (1933–2003)

Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” was a protest song. It was also a history lesson, a powerful commentary on the civil rights movement, and an emotional response to racial violence. Featured on the album *Nina Simone in Concert*, Simone wrote the song immediately after learning that four young Black girls had been killed in the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963.⁴⁴ Earlier in the summer, a white man assassinated Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi. It had been nearly a decade since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision declared segregation in schools unconstitutional, but little had changed. Police and vigilantes continued to arrest and attack protesters. The civil rights movement was at a crossroads with few tangible signs of progress. Many were frustrated and angry, and many advocated for a more aggressive and militant response to Jim Crow.

The lyrics for “Mississippi Goddam” reference the movement. Simone mentions picket lines, school boycotts, and “school children sitting in jail,” an allusion to the many young people being arrested and jailed for protesting. She draws attention to states where racial violence and segregation persisted, including Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.⁴⁵ The song also highlights the multiple ways segregationists tried to undermine the movement, from calling it a “communist plot” to being chased by “hound dogs.” While Simone is critical of segregationist violence, she also calls out moderates for telling activists to “go slow” with social change. She thus folds moderates in with those who were violently attacking activists. Near the song’s end, Simone sings “You’re all gonna die and die like flies.” That might have been a warning that segregationist violence would ultimately be met with a violent response. Or, it might have been a biblical reference, as musicologist Tammy Kernodle contends, of an apocalyptic “day of reckoning.”⁴⁶

The lyrics also trace a history of race relations back to slavery through to the Jim Crow era. Simone taps into one of the central arguments used to justify segregation: that after generations of slavery, Black people weren’t ready for equality and first needed time to catch up to white people.

You told me to wash and clean my ears,
And talk real fine just like a lady,
And you’d stop calling me Sister Sadie.

Simone captures a class-tinged argument about hygiene and language and about the Jim Crow custom of white people addressing Black individuals by a few nicknames, such as “Uncle,” “Uncle Tom,” “Auntie,” or “Sister Sadie.” Some members of the Black community responded by advocating for a politics of “racial uplift” in which education, mannerisms, dress, and speaking “properly” would become an avenue to equal treatment.⁴⁷ Simone dismisses this reasoning, declaring, “You lied to me all those years,” and she evokes a lengthy history of injustice to show that anger and frustration have been a long time coming.

Simone’s anger is palpable in the live performance of this song. The most powerful and unexpected lyric was the word “Goddam.” In place of mentioning specific acts of violence, Simone uses the word “Goddam” to suggest something so horrific and unimaginable that there is little else to say. Each of the six times she speaks this phrase—almost yelling it—it leaps out from the jaunty show-tune melody. The phrase probably jarred and unsettled the Carnegie Hall audience.

“Mississippi Goddam” captures what Nina Simone was feeling at that moment. It captures her anger, her frustration, and the ways in which she understood a longer history of race relations. It also expresses what many others were feeling. The militancy of “you’re all gonna die like flies” and “I don’t trust you anymore” signaled a shift in Black protest away from a call for integration and working with white allies and toward Black people seeking political and economic power in their own communities through their own efforts, peacefully if possible, but through more aggressive means if necessary. As much as this song was Nina Simone’s, it also conveyed broader sentiments circulating within the Black community in the mid-1960s.

Political Black Song is not always confrontational. For example, queer communities in large US cities have used dance music for community building. Various styles of music emerged from the syncopated rhythms and powerful vocals of funk, soul, and R&B musicians in the 1960s and 1970s. Singers such as James Brown created irresistible, danceable tunes. Queer musicians working in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago, among other cities, developed music that summoned community in bars, clubs, and bathhouses, especially for queer people of color. Many musical innovators in disco, Hi-NRG, and house music found homes here, creating music for queer people to gather, celebrate, and protect one another. “Gotstobeadrag,” for example, is the soundtrack from a short informational video produced by the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in 1990 to promote safe sex practices during the AIDS crisis. This video used dance music,

sampling, voguing, and drag to protect and support queer people during the worst years of the plague.⁴⁸

“Gotstobeadrag” (1990)

Created by Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz for Gay Men’s Health Crisis

Video directed by David Bronstein [“realized by Junior Vasquez”]

“Gotstobeadrag,” a five-minute video created for public television in 1990, was an important tool for protest and activism during the epidemic of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).⁴⁹ This video used music, dance, and performers from the racially diverse community of openly LGBT people in New York to educate viewers about how HIV is passed and the methods to prevent its transmission.⁵⁰ The video draws on features and approaches from Black Song, such as using music to create community as a tool of resistance (see chapter 3) and sampling existing music to create new messages. It shows how elements developed in Black institutions were utilized by social justice movements that came after the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

In 1980, doctors encountered a new deadly illness among young, healthy gay men, eventually labeling it AIDS after recognizing the illness in many groups of people. Although AIDS can affect anybody regardless of race, sexuality, or gender identity, discussions of the disease took on a political tone.⁵¹ Right-wing politicians and organizations such as the “Moral Majority” capitalized on the crisis to portray gay men as a threat to American families.⁵² Media coverage, dogged by misinformation and fearmongering, soon came to associate AIDS primarily with four groups: gay men, intravenous drug users, Haitians, and hemophiliacs. The reference to both Haitians and to intravenous drug users (tapping into a “junkies” stereotype about Black drug users) served to demonize Blackness. Black and/or gay men were regularly represented as deserving of these infections and deaths.⁵³

Within this climate, the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) emerged to educate and protect people from contracting the virus that transmits AIDS, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The GMHC’s audiovisual department, led by Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz, created videos for public broadcast on a weekly show called *Living with AIDS*. “Gotstobeadrag” is one of these videos. About five minutes long, it cuts between two scenes throughout the video. The first features Black transfeminine model Tracey Gayle Norman (also known as Tracey Africa) in front of a black backdrop primarily delivering facts and

information about HIV transmission and safe sex practices. She is occasionally flanked by two dancers, Jose Xtravaganza and Aldawna Field, fixtures of the New York ballroom scene, a community space for queer dancers, drag queens, and other performers. The video cuts between Norman and footage of Xtravaganza and Field “voguing” to music by Junior Vasquez (also known as Ellis D), a prominent DJ in New York at the time. “Voguing,” a dance style that mimics poses found in high-fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, features the dancers rapidly shifting between poses in time with the music.

The stakes and meaning of this video are clear. As musicologist Destiny Meadows writes,

The sobering final shot pulls viewers back into the reality of why the video was created. One of the dancers, face obscured from vision, dons a hat which reads in large, white capital letters “LIFE.” The viewer is faced with the stark reality of what the directors and producers have been aware of throughout: following Norman’s imperatives [is] quite literally a matter of life and death.⁵⁴

Tapping into the Black Song archive, Vasquez’s song uses three samples from Black musicians:

1. James Brown saying “gotta be a drag” from the intro to the funk song “It’s a New Day.”
2. Prominent Chicago musician Loleatta Holloway saying “honey . . . hold your wig so it won’t come off.”⁵⁵
3. The beat and singing from Holloway’s song “Dreamin’” (lyrics: “stand up and tell everybody I got him”).

Vasquez recontextualizes these lyrics, none of which were originally about aspects of queer life. He turns Brown’s admonishment of women asserting power in “It’s a New Day” into a reference to “drag queens” and “drag performances.” In this setting, overt and aggressive masculinity is turned on its head to celebrate queerness. The references to holding your wig likewise come to be associated with drag queens, who frequently perform in wigs and refer to especially good performances as snatching someone’s wig off their head. Finally, Holloway’s song’s victorious claim to her man is refashioned to celebrate queer men openly standing up and telling everybody. Here, Black Song is used to celebrate (Black) queer life unabashedly as it also turns to education to protect the lives of queer people and Black people through safer sex practices.

Another role for music within direct protest is as a tool for bringing protesters together, communicating solidarity and strength in numbers. Just as songs such as “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta” or “Gotstobeadrag” encouraged communion, others have brought people together as they mobilized for political power and human rights. Such songs are often simpler in structure and have repetitive lyrics, allowing protesters/singers to quickly learn the lyrics and onlookers to easily understand them. That is the case with “We Shall Overcome,” which became a popular civil rights anthem of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. “We Shall Overcome” began as a church hymn and was recontextualized as a protest song when striking tobacco workers sang it in the 1940s.⁵⁶ As a song in the civil rights movement, the lyrics conveyed straightforward messages of hope, resilience, and strength in its collective “We.” These messages could easily be understood and remembered. The relative simplicity of this song and others like it belies its power and effectiveness. These easy-to-sing, easy-to-learn songs became essential tools for organizing large groups of people to demonstrate with strength and solidarity.

The forces that activists challenged often required Black musicians and political leaders to hide meanings and messages. Frequently, songs of direct political action relied on existing hidden transcripts that cultivated and helped the song retain its political meaning over time. For example, in the late 1960s, Jamaican Rastas, a Black diasporic group with a parallel history of enslavement, violence, and white surveillance, learned to package their political messages within reggae music through a robust system of symbols and signs rooted in Black culture. These hidden meanings slid under the radar of the oppressive class and the music industry. Through a complex system of coded messages, reggae made constant reference to Babylon (white supremacist culture), Zion (Black Liberation), Jah (Haile Selassie), and Dreads (Black strength).⁵⁷ Such meanings were unintelligible to unintended listeners. In this way, reggae songs voicing direct calls to revolution were sanctioned by the gatekeepers of mass media dissemination (radio stations, music producers, and recording studios).

An artist such as Bob Marley found ways to leverage his fame and large fan base to create a platform from which reggae musicians could share music calling for change. He strategically recorded albums such as *Survival* and *Exodus* that were in line with palatable pop themes to build up large fan bases before releasing their more political follow-ups.⁵⁸ In his 1976 song “War,” Marley added a simple instrumental to a speech by Haile Selassie. Marley’s lyrics (taken directly from Selassie’s speech) declared that Black people would continue to fight for equality, for basic human rights regardless of race, for lasting peace, and for good over evil until those goals were achieved. Until then, there would be war.

This statement, incredibly radical for the time, would never have been played on the radio if Marley's fame had not propelled a hidden message.

The reliance on Black Song in political protests has persisted in recent times with protesters adapting songs to meet their needs. "Alright," recorded by Kendrick Lamar in 2015, became a familiar track at the Black Lives Matter protests of the late 2010s. Protesters across the United States improvised, spontaneously removed lyrics, and simplified rhythms to repurpose the song as a rallying cry against police brutality.⁵⁹ Crowds sang "We gon' be alright" in the face of armed counterprotesters and police officers wearing full riot gear. The song, in ways not so different from "We Shall Overcome," sent a powerful message of strength through communion, rooted in the knowledge of Black survival over 400 years of American history.

Throughout the experience of Black people in America, from the time of slavery to the Jim Crow and civil rights era to the Black Lives Matter movement, Black Song has served as a vehicle for protest and activism challenging white supremacy. Some of those challenges have been to affirm and celebrate Black life and to bring the Black community together. Other songs have delivered messages of resilience, resistance, hope, and protest hidden from those in power. Still others have spoken truth to power openly in a direct challenge to power. Such messages are found across genres, across time and place, and in sacred and secular music, and those messages are heard in churches, clubs, and concert halls, on radio and television, and within sites of overt protest as well as the spaces of everyday life.

Part II

Black Song: Backgrounds and Perspectives

4: Historical Contexts

Listening to Music and Hearing History

Key Takeaways

- Three histories connected to Black Song (the Black church, classical music, and blackface minstrelsy) illustrate the relationship between music and historical context, and specifically between Black culture and the Black experience.
- Black churches, some of Black Americans' most powerful and important meeting places, have served as a locus for Black Song and Black cultural practices.
- Many people think of classical music either as white or as something "universal" (equally reachable to everyone). Despite great inequities in access, Black Americans have been and continue to be important makers of classical music. Their efforts are found in a multifaceted and robust *shadow culture* that is only now being more fully researched, understood, and experienced in performance.
- Blackface minstrelsy reveals ways in which many white people have historically imagined Black Americans through harmful stereotypes. These stereotypes have been both pernicious and long-lasting, and Black people frequently use Black Song to push back against this stereotyping, creating powerful and creative self-definitions.

"Trouble in Mind" is a blues song written by New Orleans jazz pianist Richard M. Jones. It was first recorded in 1924, with Jones on piano and vocals by Thelma La Vizzo.¹ The song addresses hard times and personal travail, conveyed in the title and throughout the song, including in the line, "Some days I feel like living / sometimes I feel like dying." However, the lyrics also express hope.

Trouble in mind, I am blue,
 But I won't be always,
 The sun going shine in my back door someday.²

This song captures common human themes that mix struggle with optimism, so it is unsurprising that it has been performed by a diversity of artists. An early popular version featured blues singer Bertha “Chippie” Hill with Louis Armstrong on trumpet. Other versions have been recorded by artists associated with jazz (Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Nina Simone), with blues (Big Bill Broonzy, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Freddie King), with R&B and soul (Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke), with rock ‘n’ roll (Janis Joplin, Jerry Garcia, Fats Domino), and with country (Willie Nelson, Bob Wills, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard), artists Black and white. The appeal of the song—its melody and its lyrics—have crossed barriers of time and genre.³

A listener could appreciate any version of “Trouble in Mind” for what it means to be down and to hope for something better. But to focus only on those general ideas is to miss a great deal about the song’s origins and what it reveals about Black culture and history. Like all music, this song has a past. “Trouble in Mind” emerged from a blues tradition that drew on music to express and manage the realities of everyday life. The song’s writer, Richard M. Jones, grew up in New Orleans, where he practiced and honed his craft as a musician. Jones’s early public musical experiences were in brass bands playing in the Storyville district. Later, like so many other Black Southerners, he migrated to Chicago. Jones drew on the history of other Black Americans and on his personal experiences to write this song.⁴ The railroad is central to “Trouble in Mind,” particularly in the following verse.

I’m gonna lay my head,
 On some lonesome railroad line,
 And let the 2:19 [or 219] train,
 Satisfy my mind.⁵

Trains are a familiar trope in blues music, often serving as a metaphor for leaving or escape, and the railroad had special meaning for Black Southerners. Prior to emancipation, the term “Underground Railroad” came to represent the various means by which Black people escaped slavery into free states and Canada. After emancipation, the literal railroad carried migrants out of the South. Black Southerners took the train north and west, away from the hard life of sharecropping or farm tenancy and the cycle of pernicious debt.⁶ The train carried them from a region where Jim Crow meant stepping off the sidewalk to

allow a white person to walk past, and where a young Black man's life could be in danger if he talked to or looked at a white woman. While the regions to which Black people migrated had their own forms of racism and racial violence, for many Black Southerners, the train symbolized liberation. In "Trouble in Mind," the railroad reference could have suggested an ultimate escape from the world, or it might have meant that the "219/2:19" train could deliver this person from the South. Many Black people literally caught their train as they migrated to Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, New York, and other cities in the North and West.⁷

As a Black Song, "Trouble in Mind," represents a way into music and history. It is a reminder that neither this song nor any song from a Black musician emerged magically or spontaneously. It was a product of the Black community, of the educational and social institutions in that community, such as churches, schools, and clubs, where musicians learned and developed their craft. It was a product of traditions that stretched back to West Africa, drew on the more recent experiences in North America of enslavement and segregation, and grew from the musical roots of work songs and spirituals. If "Trouble in Mind" reflects broad human qualities that appeal to many audiences and performers, it is also a history of and commentary on a very specific Black experience. In this chapter we shine a light on the relationship between historical context and music in Black Song.

To illustrate the connection between Black Song and Black history, we examine three critical sites where race and music intersect. First, this chapter gives a short history of music in predominantly Black churches. These institutions have always been among the most powerful and important meeting places for Black Americans. From free Black churches during the seventeenth century through the antebellum period and in the post-emancipation years when Black people exercised their religious freedom as free citizens, Black worship venues have been gathering spaces, concert halls, and protest centers. Black churches are among the most significant and prevalent sites for Black Song and Black cultural practices.

Second, we examine the history of African Americans in classical music. The tradition of Black classical music allows us to explore a type of Black Song that is too rarely associated with Black culture. We show how a long tradition of Black classical music has flourished despite a history of African Americans being nearly fully excluded from the premier institutions for studying and performing this music. We illustrate how a hidden or *shadow culture* of training, performance, and composition thrived outside of mainstream venues and shaped America's classical music scene.

The third history concerns the ways that blackface minstrelsy has misrep-

resented Black people. We acknowledge that this example references a deeply painful and traumatic history for many readers. We include this distortion of Black Song because of its immense popularity historically and for what it reveals about the relationship between culture and racial practice in the past and present. Culture, as much as the law, has marked Black people as inferior to white people and has perpetuated racism. The history and legacy of blackface minstrelsy is not well known or understood at present; its pervasive popularity has been forgotten. We highlight the influence and reach of this racist practice, as well as how it shaped American music.

There are many constants in these stories. Each one illustrates the presence of African Americans in American life in varied places across a wide swath of time. Each of these histories begins during the era of slavery and continues to the present day. In each, you will notice familiar structures and stories. These historical narratives demonstrate ways African Americans have defined and represented themselves and the persistent necessity for such Black self-definition. They showcase incredible ingenuity, flexibility, resilience, and creativity by Black people. Each one reveals the important legacies of generations of people in the cultural landscape of the United States. We also highlight how the histories and legacies of these three musical practices continue to influence the present.

The Black Church

In many ways, the locus of Black culture comes from and is shaped by the Black church. Its impact extends far beyond whether one attends church. Black church culture and its values are broadly venerated and bound up with Black culture and musical practice. Black churches were meeting spaces for enslaved and newly emancipated peoples. Black churchgoers have been central organizers in the fights for abolition and civil rights. For generations, Black churches have also been venues for musical performance and for musical training. They have often been the fertile ground for the flourishing of Black American life.

The religious legacies of African Americans today are an amalgam of traditions, beliefs, and behaviors. The people from Africa captured and brought to the Americas were a remarkably diverse group, representing distinct cultural traditions and hundreds of languages. They also brought with them a range of spiritual practices from across the African continent. This cultural heterogeneity persisted with the importation of subsequent generations of enslaved people.⁸ Gradually, however, Black culture in the United States became more cohesive, forged by shared experience.⁹

A mix of religious traditions, including Christian practices imposed on enslaved African-descended people, informed the Black American experience.

Even if inspired by religious indoctrination or the obligation to save the souls of those considered less than fully human, religion was a form of control that enslavers used to regulate their property. During the antebellum period, Southern churches for Black people were primarily interracial spaces where white masters could teach a religious doctrine that somehow justified slavery, promised eternal reward for present sacrifice, and discouraged suicide in order to retain their property.¹⁰

The church involved music and was a place where many Black people (including those newly enslaved from the African continent) first encountered Western harmonies, psalms, Christian hymn tunes, and the conventions of Western congregational singing. Worship laid the foundation to develop the Black church's vocal and choral traditions. Music helped make the church a vital space for Black life, a connection that would continue long after emancipation.

The religious diaspora of Black Americans is vast and connects to the history and influence of free Black religious spaces in the North and elsewhere. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were freedmen originally born into slavery. In Philadelphia, they preached at a Methodist Episcopal church and became increasingly frustrated by the restrictions and segregation of worship for Black congregants. Jones and Allen left the church and in 1794 began the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the first African Methodist Episcopal Church in the nation. Jones became the first Black Episcopal priest, and Allen became the first Black bishop in the AME Church in the United States.¹¹ These early churches represented an important foundation for the development of the Black church.

Although it was initially forced on them, many enslaved Africans embraced and expanded the principles of Christianity. The Black church that developed was theologically based on love and communal participation. A clear example is the “wandering refrains” found in Richard Allen’s hymns. Allen took existing lines and music sung commonly in churches and added these lines to other songs. The leader sang one song, and the congregation responded with the added refrain.¹² For example, Allen added the following refrain to two unrelated hymns, Hymn No. 1 (“The voice of Free Grace cries, escape to the mountain”) and to Hymn No. 50 (“From regions of Love, lo! an angel descended”) in the same collection. This wandering refrain—sung as it would be by the congregation and beginning with “Hallelujah”—seems to function as an emotional exclamation for everyone.

Hallelujah to the Lamb who purchas'd our pardon;
We'll praise him again when we pass over Jordan.¹³

Nineteenth-century camp meetings, which were multi-day Protestant Christian evangelical events separate from regular church services, provided opportunities for enslaved people to hear preachers (Black and white) in spaces away from plantations. In these spaces, they engaged in worship by singing spirituals, dancing the ring shout, and worshipping through the night.¹⁴

For Black Americans, the driving question following emancipation was, what would freedom mean? Many answered by moving about the country to reunite with separated family members. Many formed new social organizations and churches that would be autonomous and free from white control. Black churches especially became places where freed people could gather and worship freely. Many Black churches emerged across the South in the wake of emancipation. The church, now primarily organized by choice and more racially homogenous, became a center for Black expression and restoration and a meeting ground where praise, community organizing, and momentous occasions could be carried out away from white surveillance. Hymns, anthems, and spiritual arrangements by African American composers, such as Harry T. Burleigh's setting (based on a spiritual tune) of "In Christ There Is No East or West," found inclusion in many Protestant hymnals and suggested that worshippers were part of "one great fam'ly bound by love / Throughout the whole wide earth."¹⁵ If that line potentially undermined racial difference and inequality, another verse even more directly challenged mainstream racial ideas and could be understood as a rejection of Jim Crow practices in favor of an equality in the faith:

Join hands, disciples in the faith,
 Whate'er your race may be!
 Who serve each other in Christ's love,
 Are surely kin to me.

Within this context, the formation of the Black church provided a solid foundation for united civic engagement through political action and artistic expression as segregated concert spaces often blocked the musical talents of Black Americans. From weekly religious services to regular musical programming, the Black church offered some protection from Jim Crow and even became a place where individuals could express a full Black humanity. It is thus unsurprising but vital that the Black church became a vibrant and dynamic institution within the civil rights movement.

Music and the church were central to grassroots organizing and a key to early civil rights movement successes.¹⁶ On the evening of December 5, 1955, approximately 5,000 people met at Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, more than filling the building. Those assembled began the meeting

by singing two hymns, “Onward, Christian Soldiers” and “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.”¹⁷ If the former was something of a battle hymn and rallying cry (“Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war”), the latter was a reminder of the rightness of the cause and the protection afforded those who had faith and trust (“What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms”). Singing those lyrics together would have surely intensified a sense of strength and determination. This crowd, though, was not gathered for a revival or a regular church service. They assembled at Holt Street to discuss the city’s segregated bus system and its daily mistreatment of Black passengers.

Earlier that day, 50,000 Black people in the city supported what was then a one-day bus boycott. Four days earlier, Rosa Parks had been arrested after refusing to give up her seat to white passengers. While Parks’s arrest provided a spark, a boycott plan was already in the works, developed by the Women’s Political Council. They organized a boycott to protest the almost daily offenses by white drivers against Black passengers. Boycott organizers sought better treatment by white drivers as well as the employment of more Black drivers, especially on routes that depended heavily on Black passengers.¹⁸ The one-day boycott was astoundingly successful.

It was no accident that boycott organizers rallied their community at a church. In Montgomery and throughout the South, the church was a vital institution. It was a space where families and neighbors congregated. It was also a Black Space, similar to beauty parlors and schools, that was relatively free from white surveillance.¹⁹ Thus, the Black church was a place where the Black community could talk more openly while risking fewer reprisals from segregationists. As well, churches were built to accommodate large crowds, and as places of worship they offered a safer place to discuss human rights and civil rights.

We also should not discount the importance of the hymns they sang that night. Singing in church might be expected, but this gathering was a community event. Indeed, people had come from different churches in Montgomery. Yet the hymns would have been familiar to this crowd, a reminder of their common bond, a shared source of strength for taking on injustice in the world, and a reminder that they were in this fight together, singing and “marching as to war.” That evening those who entered the church were joyous and determined. Singing reflected and contributed to those feelings. It was this collective who overwhelmingly decided to continue the boycott.

The boycott lasted for 381 days. It depended on the energy and sense of community commitment that defined the people assembled at Holt Baptist Church. For more than a year, community members held together. Those who owned cars taxied people to work each day, while others raised funds by cooking and selling meals. Black women in the community continued to play a key role in

sustaining the boycott, and a young pastor, Martin Luther King Jr., emerged as a local and then national leader.²⁰ The boycott ended after a federal district court ruled for the integration of city buses.

The success in Montgomery inspired others. Grassroots organizing grew and the Black church and music continued to play a central role in the quest for civil rights. The music of the Black church accompanied the movement's activism. The most iconic song of the movement, "We Shall Overcome," is thought to have begun as the hymn "I'll Overcome Someday," published in 1901 and written by Charles Albert Tindley, a Black Methodist minister and the "Grandfather of Gospel Music" (predating Thomas A. Dorsey).²¹ "We Shall Overcome" builds on the power of hymns and specific musical phrases that look back to the nineteenth-century spiritual, particularly "No More Auction Block for Me." Its lyrical argument moves from "I" to "we," from the individual to the community, becoming an emblem of collective action.

We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.²²

In place of the phrase "We'll walk hand in hand," a variety of phrases can be substituted to carry the song and the community forward. Examples include "We shall all be free . . .," "We are not afraid . . .," "We are not alone . . .," and "The whole wide world around. . ."

"We Shall Overcome" was sung for decades in Black churches and later served as a labor-movement anthem before becoming the most recognizable song of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.²³ Activists sang it as they marched; they sang it during boycotts, knowing "we are not alone"; it passed the time during sit-ins as protesters waited for police to arrive, believing that eventually the "truth shall set us free."²⁴ Its melody was easy to follow and its lyrics were straightforward but powerful. On April 9, 1968, following the funeral for Martin Luther King Jr., the "crowds marched through the streets of Atlanta, Georgia, behind the mule-drawn funeral caisson," notes Eileen Southern, with "blacks and whites holding hands and singing 'We Shall Overcome.'"²⁵ The lyrics, even the singing itself, united activists and fortified them against counter-protest, batons, and firehoses. It was at once a symbol of the movement's moral foundation in the Black church and its inspirational ritual of strength and survival through community.

Music remained the movement's constant strength. Standing in a line, while holding hands by crossing one arm over the other, both literally and figuratively strengthened the line against attack by vigilantes or the police. And then they

sang. In addition to “We Shall Overcome,” the movement’s repertoire included “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” and “Keep Your Hands on the Plow.” Singing reinforced purpose and reminded all why they risked physical harm and arrest. Another feature of these songs, one that drew on improvisation and call-and-response in the Black musical tradition, was the way the lyrics could be adjusted to meet a particular moment.

Consider, for example, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round.” Perhaps its most popular verse, because it could be applied to any demonstration, was this one:

Ain’t gonna let *nobody* turn me ’round,
 Turn me ’round, turn me ’round,
 Ain’t gonna let *nobody* turn me ’round,
 I’m gonna keep on a walkin’, keep on a talkin’,
 Marching up to freedom land.²⁶

The lyrics were a reminder to be determined, to let no one divert them from their quest for freedom. The first phrase (“Ain’t gonna let nobody”) could be sung by a single voice with everyone joining in on “turn me’ round.” The collective strength of the group could be heard through call-and-response.

The song was also infinitely malleable. The word “nobody” (as italicized above) could be swapped out for any number of obstacles to freedom, including “segregation” and the frequent jailing of protesters (“no jailhouse”). This titular line could also be adjusted to address potential obstacles within the Black community, such as those fearful of reprisal (“Nervous Nelly”) or those who openly or secretly aided segregationists (“Uncle Tom”). The lyrics could also be adjusted to name prominent segregationists who opposed the movement. In 1961 and 1962, in Albany, Georgia, Mayor Asa Kelley and city police chief Laurel Pritchett stood in the way of integration, arresting hundreds of activists at demonstrations. Protesters responded, singing that they would not let “Mayor Kelley” or “Chief Pritchett” turn them around.

“Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round,” like so many other songs demonstrators sang, had musical qualities that invited large groups to join in, while allowing for creative improvisation to address distinct moments and opportunities. If there was power in the collective singing, there was also power in naming the obstacles, from the larger racial system they sought to take down to the groups and individuals who preserved that system. From galvanizing unity and injecting energy to sharing ideas with passion, singing was a significant tool in dismantling segregation.

The music sung at protests drew on songs and traditions from the Black

church that had long served as a unifier across denominations and could speak to a range of challenging moments. Gospel music and spirituals tend not to conform to denomination or address niche points of theology.²⁷ Consider, for example, the most popular song by Thomas Dorsey, one of the most significant pioneers of gospel music. “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” is a simple prayer written after the death of his wife and newborn child.²⁸ In time, it became one of the standard anthems of the Black church. Its first verse could also speak to exhausted protesters in the line “I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,” while also offering strength to continue in the struggle: “Precious Lord, take my hand / Lead me on, let me stand.”²⁹ When “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” is performed, it transcends the original context and becomes a facilitator of resilience, community, praise, and reflection.

“Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (1932)

Lyrics by Thomas A. Dorsey (1899–1993)

Thomas A. Dorsey is acknowledged by many as the father of gospel music and one of its most influential figures. His composition, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” became one of the most enduring gospel songs of the twentieth century. The song’s encouraging and uplifting message made it appealing to many during times of despair and hopelessness. Dorsey’s lyrics are a plea for God to lead him through situations he could not go through alone. Consequently, the song became an anthem of the Black church, and especially later, for the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Although he made a name for himself as a blues and jazz musician, sacred music was important to Dorsey. He uniquely styled church music by incorporating his blues-playing techniques. It was at the height of his blues career in 1932 (while also serving as music director at Chicago’s Pilgrim Baptist Church) that Dorsey faced a personal tragedy that prompted him to compose “Precious Lord.” He was out of town in a revival when he received news that his pregnant wife back home had died. Gospel music historian Horace Clarence Boyer writes that after Dorsey received the telegram informing him of his wife’s death, he “retired to his ‘music’ room and remained there for three days. Dorsey said that when he came to himself after three days he went to the piano and, using as inspiration a white Protestant hymn, ‘Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone’ by George N. Allen (1812–77), composed ‘Precious Lord, Take My Hand.’”³⁰ In an interview for the 1982 documentary film *Say Amen, Somebody*, Dorsey recalled praying after his

wife's and baby's deaths and calling on the Lord, "but it was wasted I think." During his prayers, he remembered a friend calling out, "No, that's not his name! Say 'Precious Lord!'" Dorsey continued, "I said that does sound good. I got several amens on 'precious lord' and ladies and gentlemen believe or not I started singing ['Precious Lord, Take My Hand'] right then and there."³¹

"Precious Lord" became an anthem for activists of the civil rights movement in need of encouragement to make it through the arduous journey to equality. The song was a favorite of Martin Luther King Jr.; he even requested that it be performed at the meeting in Memphis at which he was to speak on the night of his assassination.³² Singer Mahalia Jackson, who popularized the song, performed it at his funeral in 1968. When she died a few years later in 1972, Aretha Franklin sang the song at her funeral. Similarly, when Franklin died in 2018, Fantasia Barrino sang it at Franklin's funeral. The message of "Precious Lord" is timeless and reflects the innovation of a blues musician using devices from that style to make sacred music popular around the globe; many still sing this song to console themselves in times of need.

The Black church historically has been an important space for Black Song. It has been a vital source of music and a training ground for musicians that cuts across all genres. It has been a place for community, freedom, self-definition, and spiritual sustenance, as well as for challenging the dehumanization of slavery and Jim Crow and for mobilizing and dismantling these racial systems. You can hear that history of the Black experience in the songs sung in Black churches, then and now.

Black Classical Music

Contralto Marian Anderson did not consider herself an activist. But in 1939, she found herself in the middle of a national firestorm that would lead her to becoming an unintentional activist. Because she was Black, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) denied her access to Washington, DC's Constitution Hall for a recital. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR in protest and then helped move the recital to an alternate venue—the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.³³

On Sunday, April 9, 1939, Anderson performed at the memorial in front of a crowd of nearly 75,000.³⁴ She sang six songs significant to her as an African American artist, beginning with the patriotic song "My Country 'Tis of Thee," signaling her claim to American citizenship and belonging. She continued with

two classical pieces, Gaetano Donizetti's "O, Mio Fernando" from the opera *La Favorita* and Franz Schubert's "Ave Maria," allowing her to showcase her classical training and her affinity for Italian and, especially, German repertoire, not to mention reminding listeners of her international stardom.

After intermission, Anderson sang three spiritual arrangements that represented her heritage as an African American woman—Harry T. Burleigh's "De Gospel Train," Edward Boatner's "Trampin'," and "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord," a spiritual arranged by composer Florence Price. These spirituals collectively represented a history of the march toward freedom by enslaved people that was analogous to the ongoing battle for equality being waged at the time of Anderson's concert. The songs conveyed messages of defiance and strength that linked a past, present, and future of the Black struggle for freedom. "De Gospel Train" uses coded language to reference the Underground Railroad with words such as "get on board" (an invitation to escape), "the gospel train's a comin', I hear it close at hand" (the escape will be soon), and "I hear the train a comin', she's speeding round the curve" (the hour is fast approaching). Similarly, "Trampin'" describes the steady walk one must take to arrive at heaven. The song could be referring literally to heaven in an afterlife, but heaven might also be a metaphor for freedom. "Trampin'" describes a slow but steady journey to try "to make heaven [freedom] my home."³⁵ Note that freedom/heaven is not granted or already present; one must continue to walk toward it. Both text and rhythm foreshadow the collective walks/marches that were already a feature of Black protest.³⁶

The final spiritual, "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord," is the most triumphant of the trio. In this song, singing and praying keep one from staying in hell for even one day. With a soul "anchored in the Lord," praying is presented as the way to overcome obstacles and to reach the mountaintop. Its message conveys that no matter what life brings, the singer will prevail. That is exactly what Anderson did; she prevailed, transforming a racist rejection into a signal triumph. Not to be lost in Anderson's performance is her sequencing of the three spirituals. She moves from a (freedom) train coming, to walking toward heaven/freedom, to the triumphant vision of freedom, none of which is given but comes only with Black action.

Anderson's performance had both political and musical implications for the future. Within the fight for civil rights, it became an important rejection of segregation and Black exclusion. In the music world, Anderson also drew attention to Black composers. As the most recognized African American voice of her day, she honored the composers Boatner, Burleigh, and Price, who wrote many of their pieces expressly for her voice, Price's arrangement of "My Soul's Been

Anchored in the Lord” among them. Anderson’s commitment inspired a generation of African American composers and performers.

Though many commentators think of classical music as racially neutral or universal, race has been crucial in defining the genre. In the nineteenth century, many white commentators and musicians worked to entrench the works of a few white composers as the standard-bearers of classical music, devaluing works by people of color. White Americans excluded Black Americans from prominent educational institutions such as the predominantly white conservatories and schools of music.³⁷ Nonetheless, Black Americans maintained a persistent presence as composers, performers, and entrepreneurs of classical music, even as these contributions have not been fully recognized in most historical accounts of classical music in the United States.

Exploring the impact of Black Song and Black musicians on American classical music sheds important light on the fringes of what is typically recognized as Black music. Classical compositions can be examples of Black Song as much as Black-coded genres such as hip-hop and jazz. A deep study of Black musicians’ rich and troubled history in classical music reveals important textures in Black identity. Just as Blackness is not a monolith, Black Song is as expansive as the people and cultures from which it comes.

The story of Black performers in American classical music is intertwined with the larger established story of classical music’s development in Europe (the main narrative in most music textbooks) and its more recent influences in the United States.³⁸ Standard histories of American music often feature the participation of Black Americans, but primarily in spaces related to religious and vernacular (popular) music, not in classical spaces.³⁹ An often-imitated chronology of the Black American music tradition includes sorrow songs that morph into spirituals, ragtime, blues, gospel, and across many forms of jazz as it evolved from New Orleans through swing, bebop, progressive, and freestyle, as well as a host of popular styles from R&B, Motown, disco, and soul, to funk, rap, and beyond. Yet during this time, Black classical music participation happened alongside mainstream white activity. This engagement with classical music has long been overlooked in many histories, despite the extensive coverage of these traditions in the Black press.

The excluded narrative of Black classical artists (as composers, performers, educators, business owners, and institutional leaders) is part of the tapestry of American classical music.⁴⁰ Our book shares the narratives of US Black classical music to forge a more accurate and complete musical history. It builds on important, sometimes hard-to-find published research, including the work of scholars—many Black themselves—who have excavated and engaged with the

music of Black classical artists. These studies include James Monroe Trotter's *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (1878), Nora Holt's writings for the *Chicago Defender* (1917–1923), James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* (1930), and Maud Cuney Hare's *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (1936).⁴¹ More recently we have Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (1971) and the publications of Josephine Wright, Helen Walker Hill, and Dominique-René de Lerma, among others. New research continues to come out, including Samantha Ege's *South Side Impresarios: How Race Women Transformed Chicago's Classical Music Scene* (2024) and Lucy Caplan's *Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera* (2025).⁴²

Musicologist and Singing Justice member Naomi André has noted that the stories of Black classical music have been hidden in the shadows. By hidden, we do not imply that they represent an inferior quality of music, but rather that its activities are typically not discussed or celebrated. This Black classical music *shadow culture* needs to be more fully excavated and highlighted in concert culture and music curricula. Without knowledge of this shadow culture, our understanding of American classical music and US music culture generally is impoverished, inaccurate, and incomplete.⁴³

Recovering this shadow culture often means looking in unlikely places. In historical documents, the musical abilities of Black people are sometimes mentioned, but often in service of some purpose other than celebrating artistic accomplishment. As Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright observed, colonial newspapers provide information about the musical talents of Black people. Often this information is found in advertisements that highlight Black individuals' music skills to enhance their value as slaves. The *Virginia Gazette*, for example, published advertisements in the 1760s referencing an enslaved person's ability to play the French horn. Other postings in the *Virginia Gazette*, *South Carolina Gazette*, and *Poughkeepsie Journal* from the 1740s to 1790s mention the ability to play the violin as a distinguishing feature of individuals who had escaped slavery.⁴⁴ Such information reveals a layer of musical accomplishment that could easily be missed or dismissed. French horns in the eighteenth century did not have valves (they were added in the early nineteenth century). While modern valved French horns are difficult to play, natural horns (without valves), like those used in the 1760s, are notoriously difficult; the ability to play horn thus signals a rare accomplishment.⁴⁵ The numerous references to violin-playing might have been fostered by the presence of a violin-like instrument in many African regions.⁴⁶ That Black musicians realized their talents even under the harshest circumstances provides a foundation for further research into Black participation in classical (European) music. Such evidence challenges the notion that the earliest classical music activity in the United States included only white participants.



Fig. 4.1. Edmond Dédé.

A recent case that has come to light involves Edmond Dédé, a free-born Creole musician and composer from New Orleans, Louisiana, born in 1827. He wrote a four-act grand opera in the French style. From the few photographs of Dédé we have, it appears that he would have presented as someone who is Black. As legislation and court decisions made it increasingly difficult for free Black people to be safe in the United States after the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) and the *Dred Scott* decision (1857), Dédé left New Orleans and resettled in France, first in Paris and later Bordeaux, where he was active as a composer and music director. His 1887 opera *Morgiane, ou le Sultan d'Ispahan*, a fully orchestrated four-act work, was recovered in the early 2000s and given its world premiere in 2025.⁴⁷

While many white American musical artists were trained in Europe (especially Germany in the nineteenth century and then France in the early twentieth century) or leading US conservatories, many Black musical artists found other means of receiving specialized instruction. They received training in their home communities mainly from musicians who were German and French immigrants to the United States. Ragtime composer Scott Joplin, for example, took lessons from Julius Weiss, who immigrated to the United States from Germany around 1870. These Black musicians in turn trained others. This was the case

for Black students who worked with opera composers such as Harry Lawrence Freeman, who studied with Johann Heinrich Beck. Freeman and Joplin were among a generation of African American opera composers born after the Civil War. Joplin, who became known as the “King of Ragtime,” was the composer of the *Maple Leaf Rag* (c. 1899) and the operas *A Guest of Honor* (1901) and *Treemonisha* (1911). Freeman, known as the “Black Wagner,” composed and produced twenty operas under the aegis of companies he founded, including the Freeman Opera Company in Colorado and the Negro Grand Opera Company in New York.⁴⁸ Among his best-known works are *The Martyr* (1893, based on an Egyptian narrative) and *Voodoo* (c. 1914). In the early 2000s, Columbia University came into the custodianship of the H. Lawrence Freeman papers, an archive that includes his handwritten musical scores and other manuscripts as well as programs, fliers, posters, scripts, and other ephemera pertaining to his activities.⁴⁹

Within just a few years of each other, both Freeman and Joplin wrote operas about the practice of voodoo and superstition in the United States.⁵⁰ Freeman’s opera *Voodoo* is set on a former slave plantation in Louisiana during Reconstruction (1865–1877) and was written between 1912 and 1914. Joplin’s *Treemonisha* is set in 1884 on a former plantation near Texarkana, a twin town on the border of East Texas and Arkansas where the composer grew up. Joplin self-published the piano-vocal score in 1911. Both composers wrote their own libretto and music; each opera is in three acts.

Musicologist Ann Sears has written about the way Joplin’s opera examines contemporary views on education as the community rallies around the title character—Treemonisha, a young, educated freedwoman who denigrates the ways of superstition. Sears relates the tension between learning and superstition to cultural themes in contemporary discourses around Booker T. Washington’s moderation politics of compromise in agricultural pursuits and W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” strategy to pull the race forward into the highest social echelons through education and accomplishment.⁵¹ Freeman’s *Voodoo* presents a very different picture of diasporic cultures. Act III opens with a set piece for Lolo, the Voodoo Queen, complete with a grand ritualistic ceremony and bravura aria. Though Lolo eventually is defeated and does not win the heart of the tenor hero (Mando), the spectacle and energy she wields reveal that she is a powerful, enticing, and innovative presentation in the operatic tradition of female sorceress characters with connections to the supernatural.

While both *Treemonisha* and *Voodoo* end in a similar place, they represent very different approaches to the tension surrounding Black religious and spiritual practices. In each opera, voodoo is suspect. The law-abiding, modest women (*Treemonisha* and Cleota—a house servant in Freeman’s opera) are the model heroines who are celebrated in the end. Queen Lolo forms a dramatic love tri-

angle with Cleota but is defeated. While Treemonisha has no female rival, her triumph is not in pursuit of a lover. Instead, she leads the town in their quest for progress through education.

In *Treemonisha*, the emphasis is on community and the power of working together. One of the messages of the opera is that groups of Black people in the early years after emancipation could form a productive community that works and enjoys leisure time together. This communal harmony is shown at the end of act II with the rousing ensemble chorus “Aunt Dinah Has Blowed de Horn” as the Cotton Pickers have completed their work and are ready to go home.

[Chorus of Cotton Pickers]:

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn,
An’ we’ll go home to stay until dawn.
Get ready, put yo’ sack on yo’ back,
I’m so happy I don’t know how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn,
An’ she wants us to come straight home,
We have not much time for delay,
’Cause our work is finished for today.⁵²

With characteristic Joplin-styled syncopations, this act II finale has the energy and drive of a smooth interlocking ensemble that knows how to give and take. Each four-line stanza begins with the statement that Aunt Dinah has given the signal that the workday is over. The number reassures the singers and the audience that the community is well ordered and knows how to work and act as productive citizens.

From the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century, many all-Black primary and secondary schools and historically Black colleges and universities had music programs and departments focused on Western European music. Consider the early Fisk Jubilee Singers, a student chorus formed at Fisk University in Nashville in the late 1860s. Though they are remembered for establishing the tradition of four-part harmonized renditions of sorrow songs that became the basis for transporting spirituals into the classical music tradition, the group began as a choir singing “opera choruses, duets, and arias” that were “mainstays of the cultivated popular tradition.”⁵³ The initial concert programs during their first 1871 tour “adhered to the white repertory they had been rehearsing for years.”⁵⁴ Rigorously trained vocally and musically by their white director, George L. White, their performances of both spiritual arrangements and standard classical music were polished to the highest degree. Audi-

ences were stunned by their skill and refinement as well as the power of the religious music that had originated with enslaved people and that at the time was unknown to most white concert audiences. Eileen Southern describes the reception of one of their concerts on this first tour:

In Boston a newspaper reporter wrote that when the Jubilee Singers sang “Home, Sweet Home” to an audience that had heard the renowned Jenny Lind sing it, the song as presented by the Black students was “rendered with a power and pathos never surpassed.” The format of the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ concerts was similar to that of concerts presented by white artists of the time, except that a large number of spirituals were included. Among audience favorites were the slave songs “Keep Me from Sinking Down,” “O Brothers, Don’t Stay Away,” “Go Down, Moses,” and such popular songs as “Old Folks at Home,” “A Temperance Medley,” and “Home, Sweet Home.”⁵⁵

As the wide-ranging art of Black American musicians is more fully researched, a rich musical landscape emerges, and it includes classical music. It reveals how William Grant Still grew up with classical recordings and W. E. B. Du Bois admired the music of Wagner, attending his operas and even traveling to Bayreuth in 1936 to do so in the composer’s custom-designed theater. Will Marion Cook composed *In Dahomey*, the first African American musical produced on Broadway, alongside many classical songs such as “Red, Red Rose.”⁵⁶ Entrepreneur Harry Pace founded the recording company Black Swan, naming it after concert singer Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a formerly enslaved woman whose voice some compared to that of the famed opera singer Jenny Lind, known as the “Swedish Nightingale.” Greenfield in turn was known as the “Black Swan.” Greenfield sang in concerts throughout the northeastern United States and in the 1850s internationally in England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Mainstream US opera companies did not allow Black singers to appear onstage. These practices began to change in 1955, when Marian Anderson became the first Black soloist to sing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, an important moment in the fight against segregation. Long before then, Black musicians had formed their own opera companies. In addition to the aforementioned companies of Harry Lawrence Freeman, others included the Colored American Opera Company in Washington, DC, in the 1870s, Theodore Drury’s Grand Opera Company in New Orleans (intermittently from 1900 to 1938), and Mary Cardwell Dawson’s National Negro Opera Company based in Pittsburgh (1941–1962). Black companies also staged productions in Washington, DC, New York City, and Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁷

To better understand the position of Black people finding space in nine-

teenth- and twentieth-century American classical music culture, the power dynamics of classical music that articulate class, caste, access, and privilege can provide a helpful lens. Such arenas did not welcome Black artists or Black audiences. This friction can be seen as an unexpected example of “double consciousness,” a way to understand how Black people living in a world where whiteness is the established norm need to be able to navigate both sides of the color line.⁵⁸ One world is associated with whiteness (such as classical music), and the other is connected to Blackness (such as the blues and ragtime). A more recent formulation of this idea is code-switching, a practice that illustrates how Black people can nimbly move between two cultural spaces, assessing and conforming to the norms in each contrasting environment. Connected to Du Bois’s construction is the expectation that the white world is not fully aware that a Black Space even exists, or at least that it is not worth knowing, since it is unrelated to their interests and experience. For Black people, double consciousness goes way beyond the luxury of interest. It is a necessity for safety and survival, especially in terms of behavior in exclusionary all-white spaces or knowing how to navigate legal regimes, such as interactions with the police and other legal institutions.

In music, awareness of these racial dynamics allowed a limited number of Black musicians to forge professional careers. In the early twentieth century, elite historically white music conservatories, such as the New England Conservatory and Oberlin College, admitted a small quota of Black students. When the Fisk Jubilee Singers pioneered concert performances of four-part harmonized spirituals, they were newly viewed as artful, as well as somewhat exotic. White choral groups brought choral spirituals to prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall. Star white singers such as Irish tenor John McCormack and American tenor Arthur Hackett regularly performed spiritual arrangements by Harry T. Burleigh.⁵⁹

For someone studying music history in American academic institutions, it is still common (at the time of writing this book) to be taught that the classical music tradition in the United States has only a few exceptional Black composers who wrote a few, rarely performed compositions. For many of us writing this book, despite having what is considered excellent music educations at top universities, we had barely heard of William Grant Still, let alone studied any of his five symphonies, eight operas, four ballets, many other orchestral works, wide range of choral works, chamber and solo instrumental works, and many songs.⁶⁰

Known as the “Dean of African American composers,” Still is noted for racially integrating many concert spaces as a conductor or composer. His opera *Troubled Island* (about the Haitian revolution, 1791–1804) was produced in 1949 by New York City Opera and became the first opera by a Black composer presented at a mainstream opera company. Another “opera first” is Still’s *A Bayou*

Legend, which in 1981 became the first opera by an African American composer to be broadcast on television. His most frequently performed opera, which has seen many revivals recently, is the one-act *Highway One, USA*. Still's operas provide an opportunity to discuss double consciousness, the talented tenth, Haitian liberation, and many other issues. No less than other art forms, opera showcases and celebrates the African American community, its struggles that fuel the theatrical stage, but also its joys and everyday humanity.

“What Does He Know of Dreams?” from *Highway 1, USA* (1962)

Libretto by Verna Arvey (1910–1987)

Music by William Grant Still (1895–1978)

Character: Nate

*Adapted from a short essay by Naomi André that appeared on the Black Opera Research Network (BORN) Forum.*⁶¹

One recurring concept in African American culture is the dream. It is a manifestation of a legacy that valorizes hard work and promises a future where things will get better. The dream is wrapped inside the late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics of respectability within the Black community. In a democratic vision of assimilation, a belief that Black people could gain access to the same lifestyle as white Americans, the dream encompasses seeing beyond a situation borne from inequitable opportunities in education, lower income, and continuing discrimination. This dream gives hope and energy to keep moving forward and believing that hard work and honest, moral living will be rewarded in the long run.

The dream is invoked many times from the Harlem Renaissance through the civil rights movement, perhaps most famously by Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King Jr. In his early poetry from the 1920s (“Dreams” and “Dream Variations”), Hughes urges us to “hold fast to dreams,” to dream of a place where it is safe to be “dark like me,” and to jubilantly dance “Black like me.”⁶² In the poem “Harlem” from 1951, Hughes also warns us of the danger of a dream deferred, the festering, rotting, and possible crusting over that can lead to explosion.⁶³

Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream was most famously articulated in his “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. Prompted by Mahalia Jackson’s exclamation “Tell them about the dream, Martin!,” the well-known concluding section, a powerful

improvised finale, combined King's Baptist-preacher background and a recapitulation of the main themes of his speech. With an almost mesmerizing repetition of the word "dream," the linking of "dream" and "freedom" becomes clear in the final moments of that historic public sermon. As King repeats, "I have a dream," the culmination of that desire is channeled through his recitation of the first stanza of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." It is here where the dream pivots to the call for freedom.⁶⁴

Still's *Highway 1, USA* is an opera that directly interacts with the notion of dreams, as well as ideas about what it means to be free and have opportunities to pursue one's dreams. Still started composing it in 1941 as *A Southern Interlude*, shortly after Marian Anderson's historic 1939 concert, and returned to the project, changing the title to *Highway 1, USA* for the premiere performance in 1963, the same year that Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. The opera provides a critical counterpoint to thinking about Black life during this time. The three main characters (Bob is married to Mary and Nate is Bob's younger brother) all sing about the dreams contained in respectable living. Bob and Mary have put all their money into supporting Nate's college education. They have done this to fulfill Bob's mother's will that Nate get an education. Bob sings, "She had her dream of a son with learning, a child who would send our name forth over all the world. Whose words would command respect, whose deeds would win wide acclaim."⁶⁵ Sadly, their mother did not have these dreams for Bob.

When we finally meet Nate in scene 2, we get a show-stopping aria that is lyrical, grand, and haunting. Unlike the declamatory tunes sung by the other characters, Nate's entrance is broad and sweeping. His opening lines ("What does he know of dreams? How can he talk of success?") are directed at Bob. Nate sums up Bob's existence as trite and mundane with his next phrase ("the honk of a horn gives him his greatest thrill") and assumes that Bob does not have a sophisticated inner life or ambition. Nate sings about how his brother has no craving to learn, no thought for the future, and refuses to take Nate's advice about such matters. Nate's condescending tone and dismissive air make it easy to see him as the villain.

What is harder to see is Nate's humanity. The musical complexities are used to represent the truth of Nate's character. He is struggling as he fails to fulfill his mother's dream that a college education will lead to great deeds of accomplishment that would garner respect and acclaim. Nate's hopelessness, as his dreams are unformed and undefined, lurks below the surface of his bravura melody. Still poses several questions about Nate's character. What does an educated Black man do when he returns to the modesty of his upbringing? In our current language of cultural constructions, can code-switching ideals bridge the

gaps between the educated Nate and his working-class brother and sister-in-law when they define success in such different ways?

Before the Black Lives Matter movement and the racial reckoning in the summer of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, audiences would rarely hear classical music composed by Black composers performed anywhere outside of Black History Month in February. Occasionally, an audience would hear this music, especially at historically black colleges or universities or other Black venues. As more high-profile organizations perform and commission works by Black and interracial artistic teams, classical music in the United States and internationally might finally begin reflecting the full range of talents and voices in our world, including many previously marginalized voices.

Recent efforts are making a difference. For example, Opera Theatre of St. Louis commissioned jazz composer Terence Blanchard to write his first operas *Champion* (libretto by Michael Cristofer, 2013) and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (libretto by Kasi Lemmons, 2019). The Metropolitan Opera, on the heels of summer 2020, presented *Fire* in 2021 and *Champion* in 2023. That the Metropolitan's music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducted both showed that such works merited the highest level of artistic commitment. Nézet-Séguin, also the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, led a recording of Florence Price's Symphonies 1 and 3, winning—along with a recording of *Fire*—a Grammy Award.⁶⁶ These performances and recordings from prestigious classical music institutions are part of an important moment in which the works of Black classical composers such as Price and Blanchard are reaching new and larger audiences. More people around the world are performing, teaching, and listening to this music, and the performances and awards have the potential to lead to even more performances and recordings, wider inclusion of Black classical music in teaching curricula, and a greater appreciation for classical music made by Black Americans.

European training and recognition have often propelled the success of American-born classical artists back in the United States, but the classical music experience in Europe was different for African Americans than for their white peers. On one hand, European countries had their own troubling colonial and postcolonial histories rooted in racism and exploitation. On the other hand, many Black Americans turned to Europe as an escape from the discriminatory legacy of chattel slavery in the United States. For Black artists able to get there, many felt that Europe opened additional opportunities to be heard. Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield toured the United Kingdom and sang for Queen Victoria in



RON CARTER



Fig. 4.2. Publicity photo of Ron Carter.

University of Missouri–Kansas City Library. Dr. Kenneth J. LaBudde Special Collections. Dave E. Dexter Jr. Collection. <https://digital.library.umkc.edu/node/22027>

the 1850s, while the Fisk Jubilee Singers toured Germany in 1877.⁶⁷ Edmond Dédé relocated to France during the 1850s and was able to continue a career as a musician (composer, arranger, conductor, and music director). Some also believed that success in Europe helped them achieve greater levels of acclaim in the United States. In the twentieth century, singers such as Roland Hayes, Jessye Norman, Paul Robeson, George Shirley, and Shirley Verrett; pianist Phil-

lipa Schyler; and composer Julia Perry all staged pivotal early-career tours in Europe. These European possibilities also extended to other African American artists, such as many figures of the Harlem Renaissance (e.g., cabaret singer Josephine Baker and authors Nora Holt, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright, among others). While Roland Hayes in the 1920s and Marian Anderson in the 1930s returned to the United States, others found that Europe allowed them to do more as creative artists, and they relocated there more or less permanently. James Baldwin relocated to Paris, for example, and Anne Brown—Gershwin's first Bess in *Porgy and Bess*—lived in Norway.⁶⁸

One of the persistent challenges for Black artists in classical music has been their rejection by the mainstream job market. A few mid-twentieth-century examples of familiar musicians who experienced such exclusion include singer/pianist Nina Simone, pianist Don Shirley, and bassists Arthur David Davis and Ron Carter.⁶⁹ Davis was one of two musicians who sued the New York Philharmonic for discrimination in 1969 and helped create today's blind audition process, in which musicians audition behind a screen so that their personal identity does not affect results.⁷⁰ While the number of Black musicians on stage has remained small, women have benefitted enormously from the blind audition process.

Bassist Ron Carter, who is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the most recorded jazz bassist in history, confronted discrimination that stunted his initial aspirations for a classical career.⁷¹ At the Eastman School of Music in the mid-1950s in Rochester, NY, Carter played bass in the orchestra. Guest conductor Leopold Stokowski from Houston remarked that "he liked Carter as a player and person, but Texas wasn't progressive enough to have a Black musician in the orchestra." Instead, Carter began playing at a local jazz club.⁷² Recalling this incident many decades later, Carter said, "I was in the jazz community because I was not allowed to work in the classical community. . . . I'm not sure I'm over that."⁷³

Peering into this shadow culture hints at the ways that Black Song has thrived in classical music. Centering Black Song in this history helps us better understand both classical music and the Black American experience.

Blackface Minstrelsy

One cannot hope to define, explore, or understand Black Song without unpacking America's tangled history with blackface minstrelsy. Unlike the physical space of the Black church or the presence of Black musicians in classical music, we frame blackface minstrelsy as a broader concept that is a practice, a way of stereotyping, and a commodification of how Black people have been seen in American music. From its 1830s origins in sketch-based performances

to the emergence of the full minstrel show in the 1840s, its dominance of post-Civil War vaudeville and theater, and its vestiges throughout the twentieth century, blackface minstrelsy thrived, despite its racist essence. In various forms, minstrelsy and its legacies have influenced popular culture, including music, ever since.

Minstrel shows created pernicious stereotypes about Black people that have endured. They feed myths that characterize Black people as hypersexualized, less ambitious, and not as competent as white people. Recent scholarship has explored how minstrelsy continues to contribute to a commodification of Black performance, identity, and representation up to the present. Musicologist Matthew D. Morrison, for example, demonstrates that Black artistic talent and the legacies of chattel slavery came together in minstrelsy to shape the relationship between music and Black experiences.⁷⁴ Our exploration of Black Song seeks to build on these complex connections. We believe that understanding blackface is crucial for exploring Black Song and entering Black Spaces respectfully. More broadly, knowing the history of blackface minstrelsy provides critical context for understanding the past and exploring its ramifications in the present.

Blackface performances featured white men blackening their faces and performing popular songs, and singing and moving in the ways they imagined Black people did. In the 1830s, singer and dancer Thomas Dartmouth Rice popularized blackface performance, claiming to be imitating a Black man he met named Jim Crow. His signature song, "Jump Jim Crow," was the first international hit song that originated from the United States.⁷⁵ In the 1840s, blackface performance was packaged within a longer, multipart entertainment, the minstrel show, which included comic endmen in blackface bantering with a white genteel interlocutor as host. The standard performance costume had the blackface performer in an ill-fitting, outlandish suit, white gloves, an oversized bow tie, and a wig of curly dark hair. The face was blackened, often with burnt cork or shoe polish, and later with a manufactured product, to a deep pitch-black color—what would become known as "minstrel black." The endmen told jokes, often at the expense of the interlocutor, speaking in dialect and using malapropisms and linguistic misunderstandings to humorous effect.⁷⁶

In the antebellum era, the minstrel show became popular in the North, Midwest, and West, especially with working-class audiences, including Irish migrants, whose association with whiteness was tenuous. They embraced blackface in part to stake a claim to being white.⁷⁷ To whatever extent these shows allowed working-class performers and audiences to mock white elites (represented by the interlocutor), they also perpetuated racial caricatures.⁷⁸ Characters such as Jim Crow, Zip Coon, Bones, Tambo, the Mammy, the Jezebel, and pickaninnies reduced Black people to a few stereotyped representations.⁷⁹

Minstrel songs from this period form the bedrock of the American soundscape. They include tunes and lyrics that are no doubt familiar to most Americans even as their racist origin has been forgotten. Early minstrel songs are thought to have been repurposed from the Irish folk song repertory, such as the tune from 1834 we now call “Turkey in the Straw” but whose original title was “Zip Coon.”⁸⁰ Later contributions such as “Polly Wolly Doodle” (1843) and “Dixie” (1859) were attributed to Dan Emmett and the Virginia Minstrels.⁸¹ America’s first professional songwriter, Stephen Collins Foster, produced a body of minstrel songs that included such standards as “Oh Susanna” (1847), “Camp-town Races” (1850), and “My Old Kentucky Home” (1853).

By the 1860s, the minstrel show had become mainstream. It now attracted middle-class audiences, including women and children. Even after the Civil War, the minstrel show continued to imagine Black people as happy residents of plantations in the antebellum South. Performers caricatured Black people as lazy, happy-go-lucky, illogical or nonsensical, and/or loyal to white masters. For example, Foster’s “Old Folks at Home” is sung by a Black narrator (often a white performer in blackface) who remembers the “many happy days [he] squander’d” and “longs for [the] old plantation,” which he calls his “good old home.”⁸² Significantly, many Americans who attended minstrel shows embraced these portrayals as accurate and authentic representations of Black people.

In the midst of minstrelsy’s popular run, a new racial system emerged in the late nineteenth century, taking its name from the first popular blackface minstrel character: Jim Crow. In the South and across the nation, laws, customs, and violence merged to limit Black economic and political gains and control the movements of Black people. For Black performers, few artistic opportunities existed outside of the world of minstrelsy and its related cultural forms. Talented African American performers with limited options sometimes took to the minstrel stage, using black makeup to further darken their complexion.⁸³ These Black composers, singers, and actors navigated impossible racial terrain as they nevertheless sought ways to express themselves artistically, to create more realistic and humane portrayals, and even to challenge the limiting expectations of blackface caricatures.⁸⁴

The Black entertainer Bert Williams performed in blackface and became one of the best-known performers of his day, singing songs such as “Nobody” in 1905 and “It’s Nobody’s Business but My Own” in 1919.⁸⁵ Although the text of “Nobody” includes self-deprecating humor, Williams found a way to push back and show his humanity through the lyrics. “Nobody” describes a person down on his luck, and no one seems responsive to his plight. Williams makes clear in his lyrics that if that is how he is to be treated, he can do the same:

I ain't never done nothin' to nobody,
 I ain't never got nothin' from nobody, no time,
 And until I get somethin' from somebody, some time,
 I don't intend to do nothin' for nobody, no time.⁸⁶

"It's Nobody's Business but My Own" similarly adopts an antagonistic tone. In this song, a preacher tells his congregation, who suspects he is involved in a scandal, that they should mind their own business and leave him alone. In both songs, there is an uncomfortable relationship between the narrator and others, perhaps signaling a difficult relationship between Williams and white audiences. Williams publicly expressed ambivalence about performing in blackface, commenting that nothing "seemed more absurd than to see a colored man making himself ridiculous in order to portray himself."⁸⁷ Performers such as Williams understood the distinction and absurdity of the portrayal of Blackness demanded by (white) audiences and the real versions of themselves.

Many Black composers trained in the Western classical tradition sought to resist and subvert the stereotypes and blatant racism of blackface minstrelsy. Harry T. Burleigh (1866–1949), who made a singular career for the era as both a baritone and classical composer, published in 1916 what is considered to be the first volume of African American spiritual arrangements for solo voice. Burleigh's influential arrangements, which made spirituals accessible to solo concert singers for the first time, were reprinted in subsequent decades. Burleigh's 1917 inscription is worth quoting in full:

The plantation songs known as "spirituals" are the spontaneous outburst of intense religious fervor, and had their origin chiefly in camp meetings, revivals and other religious exercises.

They were never "composed," but sprang into life, ready made, from the white heat of religious fervor during some protracted meeting in camp or church, as the simple, ecstatic utterance of wholly untutored minds, and are practically the only music in America which meets the scientific definition of Folk Song.

Success in singing these Folk Songs is primarily dependent upon deep spiritual feeling. The voice is not nearly so important as the spirit; and then rhythm, for the Negro's soul is linked with rhythm, and it is an essential characteristic of most all the Folk Songs.

It is a serious misconception of their meaning and value to treat them as "minstrel" songs, or to try to make them funny by a too literal attempt to imitate the manner of the Negro in singing them, by swaying the body, clap-

ping the hands, or striving to make the peculiar inflections of voice that are natural with the colored people. Their worth is weakened unless they are done impressively, for through all these songs breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man. The cadences of sorrow invariably turn to joy, and the message is ever manifest that eventually deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come, and man—every man—will be free.⁸⁸

Burleigh is describing the performance practice that African American spirituals require, differentiating it from blackface minstrelsy. Burleigh's need to make this distinction suggests that many blurred the lines between spirituals and minstrel songs. Indeed, as musicologist Nina Eidsheim notes, performances of operatic and classical vocal music by Black singers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were often perceived "as minstrel shows rather than artistic experiences."⁸⁹ For example, the review of an 1853 performance in *The New York Herald* described a hostile all-white and predominately male audience in which Elizabeth Greenfield sang ballads, hymns, and operatic excerpts, earning "plaudits" from the audience. However, this same review characterized the concert as a "novelty," referred to her primarily as the "Black Swan," compared her to various animals, and described her voice in terms such as "dark" and "bass" that emphasized her race.⁹⁰

Czech composer Antonín Dvořák agreed with Burleigh about the singularity of the spiritual in American folk music. Years prior, Burleigh's studies at the National Conservatory of Music in New York City famously brought him into contact with Dvořák, who directed the National Conservatory from 1892 to 1895. Burleigh reported that he "sang our Negro songs for [Dvořák] very often, and before he wrote his own themes, he filled himself with the spirit of the old Spirituals."⁹¹ Works central to American classical music today, such as Dvořák's 1893 *New World Symphony*, are dominated by melodies clearly drawn from the African American spiritual tradition.

Composer Will Marion Cook was a contemporary of Burleigh and also studied with Dvořák at the National Conservatory. Cook was a violinist and soon became an accomplished conductor as well. At the turn of the century, he composed several successful musical comedies. He also wrote operas and art songs, formed a jazz band, and later led the New York Syncopated Orchestra. Perhaps the pinnacle of his career came with his composition of the music for the musical comedy *In Dahomey* in 1902. *In Dahomey* represented a who's who of Black artistic talent and was based on a book by Jesse A. Shipp, with lyrics by poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. After performances throughout the Midwest, it debuted on Broadway in 1903, followed by stagings in London and elsewhere in the

United Kingdom. The plot revolves around two Black Americans who travel to Dahomey in West Africa, and it plays on the cultural affinity between Black people in America and in Africa. Musicologist and Cook biographer Marva Griffin Carter characterizes the production as a “watershed for blacks on the musical stage.”⁹²

In *Dahomey* also highlights how the trope of minstrelsy permeated popular culture and white expectations for the artistic work of Cook and other Black musicians. Cook and his collaborators were forced to work within the trope of minstrelsy and its depictions of Blackness. Thus, it is not surprising that this major Black musical included performers in black makeup, and familiar features such as banjo songs and stump speeches. But Cook and his fellow creators also sought to break free of these stereotypical limitations, and they knew it would not be easy given white expectations. As Cook noted, “The terrible difficulty that composers of my race have to deal with, is the refusal of American people to accept serious things from us.”⁹³ Indeed, just the idea of an all-Black production being on Broadway led to fears that opening night might spark a race war.⁹⁴

Part of what makes *In Dahomey* astounding is that Cook and company succeeded in creating something grander, and they anchored this comedy to Black experiences. Embracing diasporic cultural connections, Black Americans “returned” to the motherland and specifically to Dahomey, which had been the center of the slave trade in West Africa.⁹⁵ The overture and the finale, “On Emancipation Day,” tapped into themes of liberation. Similarly, actor George Walker believed that centering the African subject could be a liberating move away from the caricatured portrayals of Blackness in the United States. In fact, the African characters in the musical spoke in standard English, to distinguish them from the Black American characters. The performances on the stage may also have been freeing. Referencing Cook’s lyrics for “Darktown Is Out Tonight” in his earlier 1898 production *Clorindy*, Carter observes that the “theatrical stage became a safe venue where [Black performers] could feel equal, if not somewhat superior to mainstream Americans.”⁹⁶

There is also Cook’s song “Swing Along.” He wrote the song as he watched the cast march through the streets of London to advertise the performance, which according to Carter conveys a “triumphal end to the struggles of his people.”⁹⁷

Well-a, swing along, yes-a swing along,
 An’-a lif’-a yo’ heads up high,
 Wif pride an’ gladness beamin’ from yo’ eye!
 Well-a swing along, yes-a swing along,

From a early morn till night,
 Lif' yo' head an' yo' heels mighty high,
 An' a swing bof lef' an' right.⁹⁸

The song, which Cook explained “meant more to [him] racially than personally,” became immensely popular.⁹⁹ Ultimately, *In Dahomey* reveals that the tentacles of blackface minstrelsy seeped into every corner of popular culture, and that even in a show which included blackface, Black musicians found ways to define themselves and to create music that transcended mainstream bias.

Through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the professional minstrel show faded in popularity, giving way to vaudeville, film, and radio. Still, blackface persisted. The first blockbuster film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), featured white performers in blackface and drew on caricatures of Black people as violent, lazy, and inferior as a justification for the vigilantism of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁰⁰ Blackface continued on radio as “black voice” (white performers speaking as Black characters) in the show *Amos 'n' Andy*. It later became a television show with Black performers in the lead roles. These minstrel-derived portrayals also extended into advertising with icons for Aunt Jemima pancakes, Cream of Wheat (featuring Rastus, the cook), Uncle Ben's rice, and Sambo's, a restaurant chain that shared a name with a familiar minstrel character. In the film industry, many early animators had previously worked in professional minstrel shows. As a result, blackface minstrel skits occasionally appeared in American cartoons, while many characters visually gestured to the minstrel tradition. Mickey Mouse was drawn with a black body, a white face with an exaggerated mouth and smile, oversized buttons, and white gloves, all of which evoked the costuming of the minstrel endmen.¹⁰¹ In the original “Steamboat Willie” short, Mickey dances and plays “kitchen” percussion to the classic minstrel show tune “Ol' Zip Coon,” or “Turkey in the Straw.”¹⁰²

Beyond these holdovers and traces, blackface minstrelsy had an even more powerful and enduring influence on US popular music generally. Musicologist Matthew D. Morrison argues that blackface minstrelsy was the foundation for the American popular music industry. His term “Blacksound” recognizes a pervasive “sonic legacy of blackface.” He argues that Blacksound “informs the way we understand the making, economics, and racialization of popular music, racial identity, intellectual property relations, and culture at large.”¹⁰³ “Blacksound” includes specific musical elements meant to mark a performance as Black, including things like the banjo, lots of syncopation, or using an affected “slave dialect” that replaces “the” with “de” or “going” with “gwine.” Blacksound also includes the publishing and copyright laws that protected written notes on a page while simultaneously making it impossible to copyright a particular

original dance or way of singing. These institutional structures allowed white people to profit off the music they were writing that mimicked Black music while offering few legal protections to the original dance or performance styles of Black musicians.

Subsequent forms of popular music into the present have drawn on this foundation and reflect a complex interaction between white people and Black music. Blackface minstrelsy thus created a model that is still with us for commercializing and exploiting Black performance. Nevertheless, we still have recordings and performances by Black Americans that challenge and complicate these power structures set up to strip away Black Americans' control over the representation of Black people. That history underscores the need to center music as it is performed by Black Americans, not only as it is written, as an original artistic creation to battle the unjust legacy of blackface minstrelsy and "Blacksound" in American music.

The history of minstrelsy and its long shadow throughout the twentieth century would be incomplete without exploring how Black artists turned to artistic expression to define themselves in more genuine ways. Many examples can be found in blues music. Whereas minstrelsy imagined Black characters only as sources of white humor, the blues captured a broad swath of human emotional experience, and, in particular, a Black working-class experience. Some of those songs, like Richard Jones's "Trouble in Mind," described some of the difficulties of life. So, too, did Bessie Smith's "Washwoman Blues" from 1928.

All day long I'm slavin', all day long I'm bustin' suds.
All day long I'm slavin', all day long I'm bustin' suds.
Keep my hands a-tied, washing out these dirty duds.

Lord, I do more work than forty-'leven Gold Dust twins. (*repeats*)
Got myself a-achin' from my head down to my shins.

Rather be a scullion, cooking in some white folks' yard. (*repeats*)
I could eat up plenty, wouldn't have to work so hard.¹⁰⁴

Smith sang of the difficult job of domestic work, which would have been familiar to many Black women. In addition to suggesting that cooking (as a scullion) was preferable to being a washwoman, Smith referenced the Gold Dust twins, advertising mascots for a popular detergent. The twins were racially caricatured minstrel-like characters (pickaninnies)—pitch black, bald, and bearing wide smiles, seemingly suggesting that tedious and hard work was fun.¹⁰⁵ Smith's song critiqued the notion that (Black women's) labor is fun or easy.

Other songs spoke to and even offered advice about relationships, such as in Victoria Spivey's "Any-Kind-A-Man" (1936), in which the narrator replaces a man who doesn't "treat me like you should a wife." Ma Rainey's "Trust No Man" similarly offers relationship advice made obvious by the song's title. Others celebrated Black life or expressed pride in Blackness, such as in Doctor Clayton's "Angels in Harlem" (1946) and Ida Cox's "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues" (1924).¹⁰⁶

Some blues artists sang directly about injustice, such as Big Bill Broonzy in "When Will I Get to Be Called a Man" (1950s). Broonzy guides the listener through the dehumanizing nicknames white people have called him, from "boy" when he was an adult to "uncle" when he was much older. He has still not been called by his name, even after fighting for his country during World War II ("they just called me 'soldier boy']"). Meanwhile, B. B. King's "Why I Sing the Blues," (1968, original version 1955) links blues music to a long history of struggle and violence directed at Black people. The entire song is an answer to why King sings the blues. He begins by evoking the violence of the slave trade ("When I first got the blues, they brought me over on a ship") and enslavement ("Men were standing over me, and a lot more with a whip").¹⁰⁷

King's narrative of a Black American experience shaped by poverty and hardship extended into his present, related to the housing conditions for many poor people:

I've laid in a ghetto flat, cold and numb.

I heard the rats tell the bedbugs to give the roaches some.

From the time of enslavement to conditions in a ghetto flat, King sings that he has "been around a long time," collapsing past and present across 400 years, expressing a collective Black experience in song. Whether referencing struggle, injustice, celebration, or joy, all of which were absent from the limited and demeaning representations of minstrelsy, the blues captured the rich tapestry of Black culture and life.

While our focus is on music, it is worth highlighting that other cultural creations complemented the self-expression in Black Song. For example, painter Aaron Douglas created paintings, murals, and illustrations that celebrated an African past and its connection to Black culture in the United States. As artist David C. Driskell explained, "At a time when it was unpopular to dignify the Black image in white America, Douglas refused to compromise and see Blacks as anything less than a proud and majestic people."¹⁰⁸ Similarly, artist Archibald Motley Jr. (1891–1981) created art that captured the physical diversity within the Black community:

Well, I was trying to fill what they call the full gamut, or the race as a whole, not only, you know, being terribly black but those that were very light and those that were in between. You'll notice that in all my paintings where you see a group of people, you'll notice that they're all a little different color. They're not all the same color, they're not all black, they're not all, as they used to say years ago, high yellow, they're not all brown. I try to give each one of them character as individuals.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps Motley was thinking about the minstrel stage in which Blackness came in one color, literally the makeup color, minstrel black. But even if that was not on his mind, Motley used his art to reflect the diversity of Black people and their experiences.

Despite the production of art and music by Black artists defining themselves, minstrelsy and its legacy lived on. Even after professional minstrel shows virtually disappeared by the 1920s, minstrelsy continued in an amateur form into the 1960s, and in some cases into the 1970s. Amateur minstrel shows were staged throughout the country and well attended. They could be found in large cities, such as Boston, New York, Cleveland, and San Francisco, and in the thousands of small towns in every region of the United States. Churches, schools (from elementary schools through high school), social and civic clubs, and college groups put on shows for fundraisers and fun. They were so widespread and popular that an industry of how-to guides, scripts, and makeup emerged to support these productions. It is difficult to overstate just how popular and pervasive these shows were.¹¹⁰

The amateur minstrel show died out in most places by the 1970s under pressure from civil rights groups. Blackface became taboo, and most communities quietly buried this past without ever having a conversation about why it was so offensive. Blackface, however, didn't completely die out. It has continued in high school and college settings, often as part of Halloween costumes. Controversy periodically arises in old yearbook photos of contemporary politicians. Such traces of blackface history continue to surface.

One of those controversies revolved around the song "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia." From 1940 to 1997, this song served as the state song of the Commonwealth of Virginia.¹¹¹ The song has long occupied an ambivalent, uneasy space. African American James Bland, who was among the most popular composers of minstrel music, penned this song as "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" in 1878. He also wrote the immensely popular, "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers." Bland's "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" may have been based on an earlier minstrel tune by famed white minstrel E. P. Christy in the 1840s.¹¹² Both tunes express a longing to return to "ole/old Virginny." Christy's version is written in a thick

dialect closely associated with minstrelsy, while Bland's version is virtually free from this dialect. Bland's song is told from the perspective of a formerly enslaved person looking back to the past before emancipation. The lyrics could be read, as Virginia's first Black governor Doug Wilder contended, as glorifying slavery.¹¹³ The narrator remembers "Old Massa"—the enslaver—fondly and looks forward to being reunited with "Massa" and "Missis" in the afterlife. That sentiment has a long political history.

Going back to the antebellum period, some defenders of slavery countered arguments about its evils by claiming that this institution was ultimately good for enslaved people. Central to this "positive good" argument was the notion that enslavers loved, nurtured, and civilized enslaved people. These spurious claims were common leading up to the Civil War, and they would continue to be used long after emancipation. Some people still make those arguments and want these sentiments to be part of the curriculum on the history of slavery. In the 1980s and 1990s, debates appeared about whether "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" should remain the state song. Some objected to using a minstrel song, especially one nostalgic about the antebellum period, as a representation of the state. They also found the trope of the faithful slave and loving master degrading. For others, the song elicited a feeling of comfort and a longing for home, and some have noted its beautiful melody.

Some of the anxiety surrounding this song arises because, despite Bland's immense popularity at the time, we know little of his thoughts about writing minstrel songs and performing in blackface. We know that in 1881 he went to Europe on a tour and then stayed for two decades. In Europe he discarded the blackface makeup and instead performed "as an elegantly dressed singer-banjoist."¹¹⁴ An elegant suit would have created a striking visual contrast to the garish norms of the minstrel outfit. Perhaps this sartorial move was part of Europe's appeal for Bland. Whatever his thoughts about minstrelsy were, as Stephanie Dunson observes, Bland and other Black composers were limited by the stereotyped expectations of white audiences in the United States.¹¹⁵ We can find those expectations in the lyrics of "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny." At the same time, the work of Black performers and composers often differed, if in subtle ways, from the work of their white counterparts. Some, such as Bert Williams, seized on opportunities to present a more dignified and human representation of Black people. Others, such as Bland, drew on Black musical traditions even as they wrote songs to be performed in a white-centered cultural form.¹¹⁶ There is substantial evidence, however, that for Williams, Bland, and other Black cultural producers, navigating the racial expectations of white people was both exhausting and unsettling.

The apparent longing for the days of slavery—a familiar theme in

nineteenth-century minstrel song lyrics—are at the heart of the discomfort and tension surrounding “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny” today. Indeed, those elements seemed to be on the mind of Ray Charles when he recorded his version in 1960. The civil rights movement was gaining momentum, including in Virginia, where segregationists had vowed to prevent school integration. Charles proved to be a strong supporter of civil rights. Just a year later, in 1961 in Augusta, Georgia, he became one of the first musicians to refuse to perform in a venue with racially segregated seating. Charles’s activism helps us understand the choices he made in his reworking of Bland’s song. Charles omitted an entire verse in which the narrator “labored so hard for old Massa.” He also changed several phrases: “this old darkey’s heart” became “this heart of mine” and “this old darky’s life” became “this life of mine,” while “Massa and Missis” became “mother and father.”¹¹⁷ While other lyrics remained essentially the same, Charles’s changes were quite selective and purposeful. His version removed a demeaning racial label, as well as every possible association with enslavers, slavery, and the antebellum period. In Charles’s rendition, the nostalgic longing was now for the narrator’s actual family and a desire to reunite with them some day. If we can understand Charles’s recording as a transformation of a minstrel song, we can also understand Charles’s efforts as part of the larger civil rights movement, fought here on the cultural front. Even still, for some the song—its tune, its lyrics, or both—will always evoke unsettling associations.

Even though the imagery and sounds of blackface minstrelsy permeate the American cultural landscape, it remains a source of tension and confusion. This was evident in 2019 when a photograph of Ralph Northam, the white Democratic governor of Virginia, surfaced in his 1984 medical school yearbook. The image featured someone in blackface and another dressed in the regalia of the Ku Klux Klan. Many expressed surprise by how recent this photograph was. Northam distanced himself from it, claiming it wasn’t him and that he didn’t know who it was. Many decried the blackface portrayal in the photo as racist, while others dismissed it as a product of a far-distant past.¹¹⁸

For all the attention the image attracted, there was little discussion of the fuller history and legacy of blackface minstrelsy in American life. The person in the photo did not simply blacken their face and wear modern clothes; they sported a bow tie, mismatched pants, and a jacket, key markers of a minstrel-show performer. One of the hallmarks of these moments is how little pundits, journalists, and the public examine the known, larger history of blackface. When these discussions did occur, very few of them focused on the actual harm of blackface iconography and stereotypes, preferring instead to opine on the effects the photograph was likely to have on Northam’s political future. What this episode shows is that when traces of this very recent past of blackface emerge, they

are often met with awkwardness, confusion, and ultimately silence. Although blackface minstrelsy is foundational to much of American popular culture and a powerful force in creating and perpetuating harmful stereotypes, a full accounting of minstrelsy's popularity and influence is denied. Also missing from these conversations are the ways Black people have responded to this practice.¹¹⁹

Throughout the history of blackface, Black people have protested it. The Black community in the nineteenth century critiqued these portrayals. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, referring to the performances of the Virginia Minstrels, Christy's Minstrels, and the Ethiopian Serenaders, wrote that such white performers in blackface "have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow-citizens."¹²⁰ Music historian James Monroe Trotter was another early critic: "The American minstrel has had for his principal 'stock in trade' the coarse, the often vulgar, jest and song; a disgusting (to the refined) buffoonery, attended with painfully displeasing contortions of the body; and, worst of all, the often malicious caricaturing of an unfortunate race."¹²¹ Thus, from the beginning of this cultural practice and as it grew in popularity, Black people critiqued the practice as harmful.

Black challenges to blackface continued into the twentieth century. In response to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and its caricatures of Black people as lazy and of Black men as a threat to white women, filmmaker Oscar Micheaux produced the film *Within Our Gates* (1920) depicting strong Black characters. The *Pittsburgh Courier* and the NAACP each launched campaigns against the racialized portrayals of *Amos 'n' Andy*.¹²² Many groups and individuals called for an end to amateur minstrel shows. In the 1960s, the NAACP asked the president of the University of Vermont to end its annual blackface "Kake Walk" dance competition. The president initially refused, arguing that the event honored Black culture, a defense that was part of the legacy of minstrel shows being imagined as an accurate portrayal of actual Black people.¹²³

Scholars have interpreted blackface history in conflicting ways. Some historians and musicologists initially celebrated the minstrel show, or at least recognized it as an original American cultural form.¹²⁴ In the wake of the civil rights movement, other scholars followed the lead of Black protest and emphasized the practice as perpetuating ideas of Black inferiority.¹²⁵ Historian Eric Lott argued that blackface emerged from a paradoxical combination of white fear and desire, and others have contended that it allowed various recent immigrant and ethnic groups to become white by performing/pretending to be Black.¹²⁶ Nearly all of this scholarship focuses on professional minstrelsy in the nineteenth century through the 1920s, with little research on the amateur performances that extended into the 1970s.¹²⁷ Those silences suggest erroneously that blackface

and minstrel shows are mostly confined to the distant past. They leave public audiences and students ill prepared to discuss blackface today when evidence of recent blackface portrayals comes to light.

In contrast, in *Black Song* Black people define themselves. Such self-definitions exist in contradiction to the caricatures of Blackness that persist from the minstrel stage. Racist minstrel stereotypes were so destructive because some people believed they were real. The full history of blackface minstrelsy is critical for understanding how Black people have been represented in US culture in the past, as well as how they have challenged those representations and created their own expressions of who they are.

Black Song, Past and Present

This chapter has highlighted a few of the countless examples of the relationship between historical context and music in the story of *Black Song*, including in Black Spaces closely associated with the Black community (the Black church), spaces not usually associated with Black music (classical music's opera houses and concert halls), and spaces created by white people to construct their own version of Blackness (minstrelsy). While we have focused on the past, it is critical to understand that *Black Song* continues to be a powerful force in the Black community. A few brief examples hint at *Black Song*'s ongoing relevancy and the ways it continues to encompass the historical Black experience in the present.

We began this chapter with "Trouble in Mind," which could be heard as a universal expression of the struggles of the human experience, as well as a song about the challenges of living while Black in a Jim Crow world. Songs about the Black experience have existed in every era and blend experiences of the past with conditions in the present. When rap and hip-hop emerged in the 1970s, they were in many respects the blues of their day. As blues artists sang about Black working-class life, rappers in the South Bronx and soon elsewhere narrated their daily experience, including both the challenges of everyday living and a hopefulness rooted in their community and culture. Rap as social commentary drew on the history of *Black Song*. Consider, for example, Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," which first appeared in Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing* and was later released on the 1990 album *Fear of a Black Planet*.¹²⁸ The song encapsulated the racial tensions of the 1980s, a period marked by police brutality, random attacks on Black people, a lack of justice in the courts, and a so-called "war on drugs" that accelerated the mass incarceration of young Black and Latina/o people. Within that climate Public Enemy called on Black people to resist and "fight the powers that be." They made their pitch by tapping into James Brown's Black Power anthem "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." Many verses ref-

erence the power in Black music from the “sound of the funky drummer” to the “Black bands sweating,” who “got to give us what we need.” Another verse references rhythm and rhymes as helping to “make us tough.” Collectively, it is the music itself that serves this key role in people’s lives, one of resistance, of fighting the power.¹²⁹

The film *Do the Right Thing* grapples with racial tensions and the role of Black music and culture to diffuse those tensions, and “Fight the Power” provides a leitmotif that brings together the film’s themes and characters. Public Enemy’s song also taps into Black history, drawing liberally on the Isley Brothers’s 1975 song, “Fight the Power, Part I.” Like other funk bands of this era, the Isleys made music that gave voice to a context of turmoil surrounding the Black community. As white flight and deindustrialization produced high unemployment and poverty in many urban areas, the rhythms, pride, hope, and community of funk became part of the solution. Thus, in Public Enemy’s song, there are layers of music—from blues to funk—that tap into history (Jim Crow and deindustrialization), while also speaking to the 1980s present. As “Fight the Power” responds to racism, it also embraces community and celebrates Black music and culture as a source of possibility.

Black Song persists in more recent developments, too. Just as music anchored the civil rights and Black Power movements, it similarly propelled the Black Lives Matter movement. Janelle Monáe’s “Hell You Talmbout” (2015) and “Say Her Name (Hell You Talmbout)” (2021) names Black individuals (18 in the first version and 61 in the second) who died during encounters with law enforcement officials or from other acts of racial violence. Emmett Till, who died in 1955, Eleanor Bumpurs, who died in 1984, and Amadou Diallo, who died in 1999, are named alongside more recent victims such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and Breonna Taylor. Similarly, Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” (2015) became an anthem in recent protests. It is hopeful and life-affirming in the face of struggle—“Do you hear me, do you feel me? We goin’ be alright”—as it taps into Black history, including referencing “40 acres and a mule,” an unrealized Reconstruction-era proposal to aid newly freed Black Americans.¹³⁰ In ways that might have us thinking about “Trouble in Mind,” Lamar similarly raps about his “hard times.” He also references a critical line from Alice Walker’s 1982 novel, *The Color Purple*: “All my life I had to fight.” Like “Fight the Power,” layers of Black culture, politics, life, and history are packed into these songs.

Finally, Black musicians and artists continue to tap into a history of using song for self-definition. These portrayals cut across musical genres. Examples abound in hip-hop (Nas’s “Life’s a Bitch,” [1994] and Lamar’s “Alright”), in country music with Mickey Guyton’s “Black Like Me” (2021) on growing up Black in a very white town, and in Rhiannon Giddens’s projects embracing various Black

musical traditions, including celebrating and reclaiming the banjo. For Giddens, songs such as “At the Purchaser’s Option” (2017), about families being separated during slavery, and “Music and Joy” (2019), as part of the group Our Native Daughters, explore themes of struggle, community, and celebration that are at the core of Black Song.¹³¹ Many of Beyoncé’s performances tap into key Black historical experiences, including a 2016 Super Bowl halftime performance of “Formation” that featured dancers in black leather and berets as an homage to the Black Panther Party and a 2018 performance/concert documentary *Homecoming* at the Coachella musical festival in which the mega popstar was backed by a large marching band, an homage to another key Black institution, historically Black colleges and universities.

To listen to Black music is to hear Black history. Black Song is a vital, living force of Black community.

“At the Purchaser’s Option” (2017)

Performed by Rhiannon Giddens (b. 1977)

Lyrics and music by Rhiannon Giddens and Joey Ryan

The music of Rhiannon Giddens merges past and present in ways that showcase how American life collapses history into contemporary understandings. Those who tell those stories claim the authority to shape America’s present in ways that influence not only national identity but political power.

Many of Giddens’s songs address legacies of race, and in particular, chattel slavery. “At the Purchaser’s Option” is the opening track of her 2017 album, *Freedom Highway*. The song title refers to a line in a newspaper “For Sale” advertisement from 1797 published in Kingston, New York, a town on the Hudson River north of New York City. The yellowed clipping announces a 22-year-old woman for sale.¹³² She is described as “a remarkable, smart, healthy Negro Wench . . . used to both house work and farming.” Such advertisements were common in early American newspapers and reveal how enslaved individuals were not seen as human, but merely as things to be bought and sold, like a cart or a crop. Giddens reminds her listeners that slavery was legal outside of the South, since every colony and most states permitted slavery at some point in its history. New York, for example, did not abolish slavery until 1827. Giddens came across the notice in 2016 and was devastated by the advertisement’s final line: “She has a child about 9 months old, which will be [sold] at the purchaser’s option.”

That the bond between mother and child could be so arbitrarily and callously

broken “at the purchaser’s option” reveals the base dehumanization of American slavery in which people were treated as livestock without feelings or humanity. A perpetual threat, dividing families was used as a punishment and a means of control, preventing a sense of community and disabling organized resistance. Family members torn apart would probably never see one another again. That enslavers used family separation as a threat gives proof to the lie that they did not understand or chose to ignore the humanity of the enslaved.

“At the Purchaser’s Option” begins with a bass-heavy drum riff, soon accompanied by string bass and off-beat guitar. This rhythm track, which is heard throughout the song, evokes the monotonous, exhausting, and relentless labors of the enslaved woman. Giddens soon enters on a five-string tenor banjo, playing a similarly static melody. Rather than the bright, metallic sound of the modern banjo, we hear the dark, hollow sound of the early commercial banjos made in the United States. Giddens performs on a reproduction of an 1858 banjo, closer to the hand-made plantation-style instruments, which for her retains its “African sound.” For Giddens, this instrument has “deeply cultural and spiritual” connections to the “generations of my ancestors who played or were touched by this combination of wood, skin, and gut.”¹³³

The song’s lyrics speak as if intoned by the 22-year-old new mother of the newspaper’s advertisement. She begins, “I have a babe but shall I keep him?” Through three verses, Giddens offers the story of a Black woman who is owned by another, who has raped her and fathered her child. Every minute of her labor is “overtime,” uncompensated, coerced. Her fingers bleed to make her enslaver rich. The chorus repeats the many things that can be taken away—her body, her bones, her blood, while countering that her soul can never be taken from her. Still, like the newspaper clipping on which it is based, Giddens’s song ends without a resolution. There’s no reassurance that mother and child remained together. Yet the Giddens song offers a positive message. As the chorus is repeated, Giddens’s voice as well as the musical accompaniment take on increasing strength. It suggests that the act of resistance itself—the unwavering claim to one’s own soul and selfhood in the face of oppression—is an exercise not just in preservation, but in perseverance and a restorative act of humanization.

5: Black Song and the Problem of Music's Canons

Key Takeaways

- Musical canons create barriers to a broader and deeper understanding of Black Song and music as a whole.
- Canons function as tools of white patriarchal supremacy that minimize the artistic achievements of women and people of color.
- Black voices are often misunderstood in vocal pedagogy when viewed through the lens of the classical canon.
- The country music canon has downplayed and suppressed its Black presence, including in the establishment of racialized commercial genre designations such as race records, old-time music, rhythm and blues, and hillbilly music.
- The canon is unlikely to be eliminated, but it can change, and it is changing. If we welcome new works and new voices, our collective understanding of excellence and value can be more permeable, inclusive, and just in ways that will enrich, expand, and more accurately reflect the true multicultural artfulness of music.

One of the fundamental problems the Singing Justice Collective encountered in studying Black music is that Black composers and musicians are structurally excluded from formal music education. Erasure is a self-perpetuating affliction, even as the causes of this absence are many. When Black music is not taught, information about and experience with this repertoire escapes future generations of performers and teachers. Unrecognized, this music is not researched, published, performed, or recorded. We are committed to breaking this cycle of silence. However, a core barrier we regularly encounter is the pervasive power of the canon of musical works, an almost exclusively white male canon.

By “canon,” we refer to an unwritten but well-known understanding of a core repertoire accepted as exclusively valuable and excellent. A canon’s boundaries

are rarely explicit, but they divide the musical world into that which is worthy of study and performance and that which is not. Rather than a specific list, a canon is a vague collection of work most typically heard on concert programs, endorsed by music textbooks, and included on radio and streaming playlists. This construction of the canon in no way emerges from an objective assessment but instead reflects long-standing prejudice and discrimination within society. Such a canon is incomplete and distorted. More recent creative work is excluded from consideration. It is a self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating discourse that resists revision. It reflects the bias of privilege, chauvinism, chance, access, and manipulation, while ascribing to the myth of merit and objectivity.

Canons form the basis of nearly all musical study in schools and departments of music at mainstream American universities. It is the music that is known, taught, and thus known again. Traditionally, formal music education focuses on the canon of classical music, but there are canons for all musical practices, including rock, country, jazz, gospel, hip-hop, Latin, and more. These canons might include the artists inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the selection of songs for collections of jazz standards, or Top 50 or Top 100 lists such as those frequently created by *Rolling Stone*.

Another problem with the canon is its implication that music can be best or most fully understood and valued in a timeless, abstract realm. *Black Song*, however, demonstrates the power of understanding art in terms of the time, place, and social circumstance of its creation and use. If art is of social significance, it cannot be fully appreciated in ways that are separated from its sociopolitical milieu.

Musical canons are seductive and at times useful because they serve as a shared body of work for engagement, discussion, and debate. Canons provide a common repertory that can be tested critically as a basis for understanding history, its innovations, and its most influential figures. Organizing the vast legacy of musical creativity, canons serve as a collective starting point. They distill an enormous body of work down to a select group of pieces and creators that characterize a particular style's aesthetics and that create the basis for understanding how these practices evolved over time.

Gospel can serve as an illustrative example. Among many gospel musicians, the canon of important and influential composers and choir leaders begins with Thomas Dorsey and continues with figures such as James Cleveland, Mattie Moss Clark, and Ricky Dillard. By comparing songs from these composer-directors, we see a progression of the art form over time.¹ Dorsey is part of this canon because of his role in creating the gospel choir in the 1930s. However, in Dorsey's music, there were no prescribed parts; instead, there was more of a free-for-all of homophony. You can hear this style even in a recording like "Get Right Church" by James Cleveland and the Voices of Tabernacle.² While the core

four-part harmonies are clear, there is much room for improvisation over and within that texture. Mattie Moss Clark is generally included in the canon because of the influence of her family group, the Clark Sisters, especially in their use of tight unison singing in this group of strong female soloists. However, before the creation of that group, Clark is often credited as the person who formalized the gospel choir into a three-part structure, leaving out the bass lines in the choir, and allowing little room for improvisation by the choir members. An example of this practice is the 1978 recording of Clark directing the Michigan State Community Choir and her daughter Dorinda Clark Cole singing “If You Believe in God” from the album *I Am Crucified with Christ*.³ The genre has evolved further to include more polyphonic elements, as can be heard in Ricky Dillard’s “More Abundantly Medley” on the 2020 album, *Choirmaster*.⁴

Claims to the canon always rely on false assumptions. The most pernicious of these is that such works are not just exceptional but superior to all others and represent the masterworks of a particular tradition and the apex of the world’s collective musical expression. While many music fans, including those of us in the Singing Justice Collective, find many canonical works astonishing and beautiful, well crafted, intellectually fascinating, and emotionally compelling and powerful, we also find the implication that these are the best or only musical works worthy of deep study to be categorically false. Music is at stake. This widely known but rarely defined collection of recognized masterworks has an outsized influence on understandings of music in the public sphere as well as institutional music training generally.

The perniciousness of the canon results from the assumption that canons are immutable and complete rather than necessarily dynamic. Canons are too little questioned. They imply infallibility and imply that they already feature the full body of music and artists who are truly worth hearing, studying, and teaching. Canons are never true nor complete. As the Singing Justice Collective, we acknowledge that canons can be useful, but we insist on opening them to new possibilities and to strategic engagement with musics that have been historically excluded from cultural production and thus consideration. We therefore strive to disrupt these canons in order to expand them and to allow new works of beauty and impact to enhance our collective understanding of the art. In this chapter we discuss two canons in need of disruption: (1) the relatively formalized classical music canon that is the basis of most formal music education, and (2) the primarily oral canon of country music.

Interrogating the Classical Music Canon

Classical music, sometimes called Western art music or Western European classical music, is a style of instrumental and vocal music that was popular in Ger-

many and Austria and then exported internationally through systems of influence, imperialism, and global colonization between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. The first use of “classical” to refer to music in this tradition might have been in 1836 by music theorist and critic Johann Gottlieb Wendt, who was describing the music of the previous generation to distinguish it from what is now known as “Romantic” music.⁵ Written by composers such as Franz Josef Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the music of the “classical” period was built on a system of hierarchically structured musical tones that suggest movement across time within a piece, a structure referred to as “tonal harmony.” Its performers typically follow written musical notation or sheet music. Voices and acoustic instruments are unamplified and organized into like groups, such as an assortment of strings, woodwinds, brass instruments, and percussion instruments. These instruments are frequently brought together into ensembles, from duos, trios, and string quartets to choirs and orchestras.⁶

To refer to all of this music as “classical music,” however, was an even later development. It refers not to a style, but to the ability of this music to elevate the individual and society. In English-speaking areas, the term “classical music” began to be used more expansively in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it connotes an idea of “good music” that many thought to be edifying and educational.⁷ The early leaders and patrons of America’s exclusive and elite musical institutions, along with sympathetic critics and musicologists, positioned so-called “classical” music above folk or commercial popular music within a cultural hierarchy.⁸ These elites used the cultural cachet of their privilege to celebrate music that would be inaccessible to the general public, staging operas in European languages other than English, limiting concerts to expensive subscription series, and refusing to program popular works that they deemed insufficiently sophisticated. They privileged works and composers that did not respond to antagonistic, contemporary political or cultural trends. They chose music that could be seen as “universal” or “timeless.” These works in turn validated their own privilege. The racial bias of these arguments, which positioned classical music as European and therefore as white, is often implied in these arguments and sometimes stated directly. These attitudes continue to be an important way that many understand classical music today. The role of classical music in navigating and policing social-class hierarchy goes unmentioned. Defending the purity of the classical music canon thus enabled a denial of its social and political function, suggesting that the way things were was the only and best way.

Beyond the concept of defending the “purity” of the classical music canon rests a cultural barrier formed by the concept of “musical universality,” with a familiar body of repertoire that is foreign, disconnected from context, and

almost exclusively white. Any deviation from whiteness, in the form of drawing attention to race, becomes a source of risk. Especially in vocal music, where text and embodied performance personalize expression, any reference to Blackness stands out like a cellphone ringing during the slow movement of a symphony. When the singer must express anger and frustration related to the African American experience, for example, as in settings of Langston Hughes' poem "I, Too" ("Nobody'll dare / Say to me, / 'Eat in the kitchen,' / Then."), white audiences can get very uncomfortable. All performers face the hurdle that this repertoire is not often performed or taught as part of standard training and is thus not well known. Non-Black performers will also fear crossing the color barrier and risking comparisons to blackface minstrelsy or accusations of appropriation. Conversely, Black performers are put in the position of risking their classical bona fides by singing repertoire outside the accepted European canon, or in the case of performing a song that utilizes dialect, perpetuating racial stereotypes. The layers of discomfort can be paralyzing for the performer, regardless of race.

Classical music's canon is dominated by works from the eighteenth through early twentieth centuries. Examples include Johann Sebastian Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor*, Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*. No official or comprehensive list of such masterpieces exists, but discourse, performance, and repetition clarify membership.⁹ The classical canon lifts up only a narrow selection of musical creativity. There is no fair and inclusive musical competition to determine winners or losers based on objective merit. Such a canon is necessarily incomplete and distorted. More recent creative work is disadvantaged; notated works are privileged. The canon reflects the bias of influential figures.

The creators of works accepted into the canon are celebrated as musical geniuses, and—not coincidentally—have historically been comprised almost entirely of white men. These composers of social power and privilege had many advantages: access to professional training, the ability to secure performances, generous financial support, opportunities to get published, and benefits that came from musical income and financial patronage. Women have been largely excluded from consideration. This construction of the canon in no way reflects an objective assessment but reflects long-standing prejudice and discrimination within society. In that regard the canon of classical music has also been a tool for white supremacy.

Studying Black Song through the framework of the white classical canon fundamentally distorts understanding. Doing so divorces Black music from performance, its community, and the spaces and practices that fuel it. The criteria for canonical inclusion are incongruous with the practice of Black Song, which is rooted in process. Improvisation, for example, makes each performance unique.

Notes and rhythms change. Variation is valued. Black Songs are often recipes rather than prescriptions, frameworks rather than precise codes. The jazz standard, for example, is a cyclic harmonic pattern plus a composed, framing melody. Classical music, of course, has also featured improvising musicians—J. S. Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Anthony Davis, and Billy Childs. If audio recording had been invented in 1677 rather than 1877, earlier spontaneous musical imaginations would have been captured and celebrated. Imagine freestyle Bach or Beethoven alongside Charlie Parker and Mary Lou Williams. If this had happened, music history might be fundamentally different.

The canon frequently devalues and excludes the works of Black musicians on the basis of quality. This reasoning suggests that the symphonies of Still and Price, along with William Levi Dawson, do not belong next to those of Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms. A fair comparison of Price versus Brahms remains impossible because the canon is a construct of history that misrepresents the choices of one era as timeless and absolute. That works by Black, Indigenous, and other musicians of color were denied consideration for more than three centuries creates an impossibly skewed evaluation. Symphonies by Beethoven and Brahms have received countless performances and thousands of recordings. Conductors and instrumentalists come to know these works through a centuries-long tradition. In contrast, there are still fewer than a half-dozen recordings of symphonies by Florence Price, and (as of 2025) the performance materials for her works remain in a state of disrepair, according to musicians close to this group. Musicians are just beginning to understand how to realize her music to bring out its depth and power, a process that can take generations of musicians interpreting the notation and experimenting with interpretation. Schubert's more than 600 songs have been published for some two centuries; the songs of Margaret Bonds are still being rediscovered and published today.

Music theorist Philip Ewell's 2023 book *On Music Theory and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* explores the problem of the classical canon and especially its role as a tool for entrenching systems of hierarchy, particularly racial hierarchy. Ewell argues that classical music is best not defined as either Western or European, as others intending to be more specific and racially respectful have claimed. Instead, he observes that these terms are built on constructions of the world that falsely distinguish white people and Europe from everyone and everywhere else. Western European culture is imagined as descending from a pure white Aryan/Greek root, while Asia and Africa are cleaved away as impure and lesser by comparison. To maintain the fiction of an exclusive white origin for Western thought or culture, these narratives ignore that the Ancient Greeks celebrated the influence of Egypt and were connected to Asia through the Silk

Road. Ewell explains how the erasure of Africa and Arabia from the “West” has been continually repeated and reinforced through music:

If Europe and its racial whiteness were to be put forth as superior, it would need a story to sell this superiority, and the European/Aryan model of ancient Greece provided just that. Musicians were quick to follow suit with their own promotion of white-male greatness in the realm of music composition and music history, with its western canon of music theory and history.¹⁰

The construct of the canon, often reinforced by public performance and music school curricula, is unstable. At best, it is incomplete. At worst, it has been created to “naturalize” a system that distorts human value by advancing one type of person (most commonly, white men) to the disadvantage of all others (all women and anyone not white). This book is, in part, an attempt to embrace and center an excluded but expansive repertory to rediscover new music and new ways of thinking about music that are more just. Composer Olly Wilson offered a clear pathway forward as early as 1983, writing:

Ultimately, the basic criterion used to determine if a work of music is art . . . is the same. . . . That criterion is the degree to which that music, either as part of a more complex utilitarian experience or existing alone, significantly informs and enriches our lives.¹¹

Black music can transcend notions of canon and its related subcategories: genre and *fach* (a system of vocal categories). Black Song transcends typical musical frameworks like genre in part because Black artists have learned to excel in multiple creative spaces. As doors of opportunity close and open, Black artists have found possibility. With limited opportunities for institutional careers in orchestras or educational institutions, for example, Black musicians learned to participate in many other genres, increasing their likelihood of success. If you look at the biographies of many influential Black American musicians, you find them traversing seamlessly across diverse musical styles. The career of Major N. Clark Smith exemplifies this phenomenon as he worked across a range of musical institutions, genres, and styles.

Smith, born in 1866 in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was a military band leader and is considered the father of formal Black music education. Mentored at an early age by a German military band leader, he later attended Western University, a historically Black college in Kansas City, Kansas. Smith became one of the first to notate spirituals and to map the spiritual's sound world to the pentatonic scale. While later teaching at Western University, he established a system for

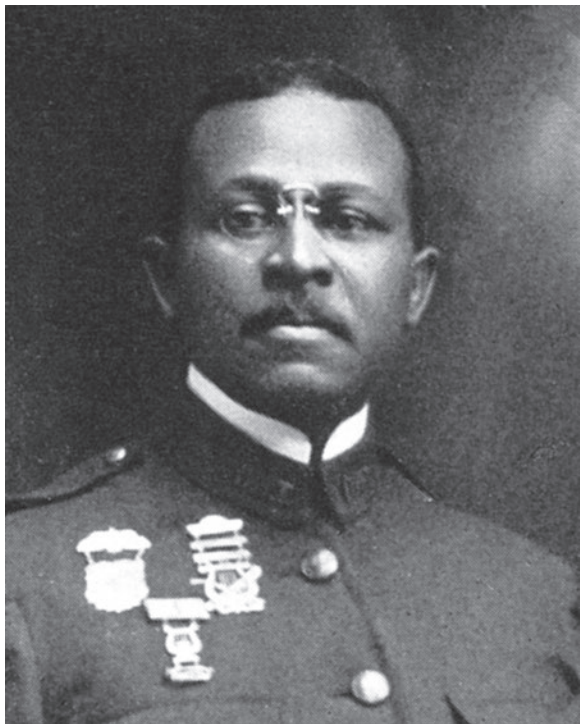


Fig. 5.1. N. Clark Smith.
Unknown. University of
Iowa Special Collections.

students to compose spirituals.¹² There he mentored Eva Jessye, an arranger of spirituals and a pioneering female choral director of her own professional ensemble, the Eva Jessye Choir. Jessye's choir worked in Virgil Thompson and Gertrude Stein's 1933 opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* and in George Gershwin's productions of *Porgy and Bess* beginning in 1935. She is credited with giving many well-known Black concert artists their first break in these productions. Her group served as the official choir of the 1963 March on Washington. Smith also taught Nora Douglas Holt, a classical pianist, music composer, and cultural critic, who in 1919 became one of the founders of the National Association of Negro Musicians, an organization dedicated to conserving concert music traditions within the African American community and still in existence today.

An accomplished composer, Smith's *Negro Folk Suite* received national recognition. It was awarded a Wanamaker prize in 1930 and was later performed by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1933 under the direction of Vladimir Golchman. While teaching at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Smith taught the composer William L. Dawson, who later replaced him as the music teacher at Kansas City's Lincoln High School. Smith was instrumental in establishing key



Fig. 5.2. Dr. Eva Jessye.

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Black school and community classical music programs in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago, and he introduced the saxophone to the Black communities in Kansas City and Chicago through his teaching, helping to make the instrument synonymous with jazz. In addition, his students included jazz greats Nat King Cole, Lionel Hampton, Milt Hinton, Bennie Moten, Walter Page, and Charlie Parker, who in turn altered the fabric of American popular music.

In the vocal world, Black artists often break with the musical frameworks in white-dominated classical music spaces, such as the strict categorizations of *fach* (voice type) or the adherence to rigid boundaries between sacred and secular music. Black musical practices instead function through other principles. Commonly learned in the church, Black vocal practices tend to center versatil-

ity in vocal color to express a wide range of emotions. Improvisation and informal performances mean that an ability to sing across multiple voice parts is prized, practiced, and even desired among Black performers. It is common to see women tenors in the choir loft of a Black Baptist Church on a Sunday morning. These women can join the soprano section if the choir director needs more voices or if someone is sick. Such skills are not genetic but learned and practiced. Not knowing the community origins of these skills can lead to misunderstandings. Vocal effects like growling, belting, and sudden shifts in vocal registers have sometimes led classically trained pedagogues to believe, falsely, in the existence of a Black voice genetically distinct from non-Black voices.

Singers who embody the Black sound of the church (and use a strengthened falsetto in pop and other forms of music) appear to have more fluidity navigating head and chest voices while singing effortlessly in the extremes of their range. Additionally, it is common for Black singers to break molds like voice type or fach. A famous example is Marian Anderson, who had a range that spanned from contralto to soprano. Yet the music industry, using the framework of voice type to define her artistry, pigeonholed her as a contralto instead of letting her sing all the music she could. The industry too often hears race when evaluating Black singers. Black voices are often wrongly categorized as “dark,” which sometimes leads well-intentioned teachers to assign spirituals only to Black students, thinking this corpus of song is somehow more natural for them to sing, because of their race and misconceptions about the characteristics, range, and timbres of Black voices.

Another ill-fitting framework for Black performance influenced Anderson’s branding as a contralto. Lieder performance by performers such as Anderson and Roland Hayes was challenging to music critics in 1930s Germany. Critics were effusive in their praise but couldn’t rectify Anderson and Hayes’ authentic performances with their visible Blackness. As historian Kira Thurman notes, “However entranced listeners were by her stunning renditions of Schubert lieder, they nonetheless could not imagine Anderson as both black and capable of expressing the German spirit.”¹³

Musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim uncovered troubling beliefs among classical voice teachers today at American institutions of higher education relating to “sonic blackness,” a term Eidsheim defines as “the perceptual phantom of a vocal timbre, projected by the listener, which happens to match current expectations about blackness, or the shaping of a vocal timbre to match ideas about blackness.”¹⁴ Eidsheim observed that many voice teachers tried to develop the “individual” sound of the voice, emphasizing supposedly “natural,” “ethnic” qualities of that voice. Yet we know these qualities are socially constructed.

Interestingly, “all but two teachers told [Eidsheim] that they can always tell the ethnicity of the singer by his or her vocal timbre.”¹⁵ Eidsheim goes on to explain.

I frequently heard such statements regarding the *individuality* of a voice, by which my interviewees meant, I believe, the opposite: “an ethnic vocal timbre,” determined by *socially* constructed notions of ethnicity.¹⁶

She lays bare the white supremacy of classical vocal pedagogy, which was “aided in part by findings encouraged and enabled by colonial racial dynamics and research resting on colonial power structures” (i.e., rooted in predominantly white institutions with little exposure to the variety of Black voices). Eidsheim’s most salient point is that as formalized vocal practices are encultured, so are many other aspects of the voice, which we have been trained to perceive as “natural.”¹⁷

Singing Justice member Samantha Williams shares her experience:

As a classically trained Black classical singer I have found myself running up against the nebulous concept of a Black fach or the Black voice at different stages in my career. The first time I heard the idea of a “Black fach” stated explicitly, I was studying in Florence, Italy. My Florentine teacher expressed his absolute delight at having a Black mezzo-soprano in his studio, as this was one of his absolute favorite voice types. He was thrilled to dive into the depth and dark colors that I could create with my voice, and he gave me songs that he thought were well suited for the Black mezzo fach. Which incidentally were all from roles of women in intense distress.

When I studied in the States, one of my early voice teachers counseled me against singing spirituals or any stereotypically Black operatic songs, as she warned me that it was very likely that that would lead to me being typecast as a singer who could only sing “black songs.” This advice instilled in me the importance of focusing on the European operatic canon in my vocal training if I wanted to be a serious singer. Maybe she jinxed me, but the very next teacher I worked with, another well-meaning white woman, told me that she had recently had another Black student who was very interested in spirituals. She encouraged me to explore this music. She gave me recordings of Kathleen Battle (a coloratura soprano whose voice is all but the polar opposite of my own) as a model. She instructed me to connect with my inner gospel singer when I sang spirituals.

Such beliefs about natural, ethnic vocal qualities, no matter how well-intentioned or misinformed, are damaging. They further marginalize Black singers seeking to make a career in classical music’s still primarily white space.

Vocal pedagogy itself needs to be reexamined and possibly restructured with antiracist data, or at least with eyes (and ears) wide open to the influence of white expectations. Vocal instructors must also acknowledge that perceptions of certain vocal timbres as Black or as relating to other ethnicities are enculturated in the listener and performer. They are not “natural,” but learned.

There is a real danger of recolonizing Black music in performance and pedagogy when they are not contextualized historically and with care. The classical canon cannot be corrected simply by adding to contemporary concert programs a handful of token works by musicians who identify as women or people of color. Doing so risks appropriating or recolonizing Black creativity in service of a classical canon that has not opened itself to new thinking or communities. To honor Black musical creativity requires not simply an embrace of Black content but an understanding of Black musical practices.

Institutions of musical education, for example, should question not just the content of their courses but whether the musical skills being valued are truly inclusive. Improvisation is one such skill. Too often, bringing a Black musical artist into a classically trained chamber ensemble or orchestra is less an act of stylistic embrace than a confession of musical disconnect. Typically, classical musicians are paralyzed when the notated musical arrangement breaks for a solo by an improvising musician. Such moments reveal a gap in conservatory-based musical training. No trained musician should be caught at a loss when faced with the opportunity to invent musical sound.

Musical institutions should allow themselves to stretch and grow—to see social justice as a service to others and an invitation to learn from their communities. Performing or even commissioning a work by a Black composer in one’s own standard concert hall for one’s own regular audience is a positive step, but taking that same work to a Black church offers yet another profound opportunity. Social justice is not a one-way act; it must be reciprocal. It must involve listening as much as it involves making sound. These lessons apply not only to the classical canon but also to canons that have emerged in other musical traditions.

The Country Music Canon

Country music offers another example of an American musical canon that at once ignores the contributions of Black Americans and constrains Black musical creation. As with classical music, canon formation in country music is an ongoing process. A country canon has been frequently articulated in the lyrics of country songs when artists and songwriters refer to their predecessors and sing about their musical influences. With their 1972 album *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, for example, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band bridged to previous generations of

country superstars, including the Carter family, Roy Acuff, and Hank Williams. Songs such as “Who’s Gonna Fill their Shoes” (1985) by George Jones similarly help construct country’s canon, as Jones celebrates a long list of (white) artists—Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Charlie Feathers, Elvis Presley, and Jerry Lee Lewis, among others. In the chorus Jones then asks, “Who’s gonna fill their shoes?” and “Who’s gonna play the Opry and the ‘Wabash Cannonball?’”¹⁸

The Opry for Jones and songwriters Troy Seals and Max Barnes is a reference to the Grand Ole Opry, one of the most enduring and influential country music institutions. If we seek an official list for country music’s canon, the Opry’s list of permanent members is a good place to start. In its nearly 100-year history, the Opry has admitted only three Black Americans (none of them women) as members: DeFord Bailey, Charley Pride, and Darius Rucker. Similarly, the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville includes only Pride, Bailey, and Ray Charles, all inducted after 2000.¹⁹ As these lists show, there are remarkably few Black artists in country music who enjoy the prestige and endorsement of country music’s canon.

Despite the absence of Black artists in these spaces, country music is very much a Black Space. Some readers will be surprised to read this. Many think of country music as something separate from Black American music. When we surveyed students in our courses about musical genres, for example, only 14% of respondents associated country music with Black American singers, songwriters, composers, and musicians. The role of Black people in country music has not always been fully recognized, even by scholars. A common assumption is that country music has a Black influence but no Black presence. However, as country music songwriter Alice Randall argues, this assertion is wrong. Black people have been influential *and* present in country music from its beginnings and throughout its history.²⁰ As we make the case for rethinking the country canon and reconsidering what it means to understand country music as a Black Space, we draw on Randall and a number of historians and musicologists who have shown that the many genres that emerged from the South in the early 1900s—including blues and country—share much of the same cultural DNA.²¹ Country music owes as much to the contributions of Black musicians as to white musicians.

When Black musicians, recently including Lil Nas X and Beyoncé, release country songs, they invariably generate controversy about whether they are “country enough.” For Beyoncé, that controversy persisted even after she won the 2025 Grammy for Best Country Album. Can Black Song appear on country radio, be performed on the Country Music Association (CMA) Awards show, win CMA awards, or appear on the Billboard Hot Country chart?²² Some question the credentials of these musicians and point to generic dog whistles about

tradition, musical styles, or heritage.²³ These controversies excluding Black Song often inspire interviews, articles, and social media posts claiming that Black Americans were the original creators of country music, engaging questions of appropriation and theft similar to other styles such as hip-hop, jazz, or early rock 'n' roll. Yet both claims flatten a more nuanced and interesting truth. We can see this intertwined history in a comparison with the blues (and its descendent genres, such as rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, soul, and funk) and country music.

Blues histories typically claim that the genre emerged from a network of southern Black musicians drawing on West and Central African traditions, work songs, and spirituals to create music that tells of the hardships and community of southern Black Americans, especially those newly emancipated but living in extreme economic and social hardship.²⁴ In contrast, the most common story of country music is that it came from English ballads, the fiddle tunes of Scottish and Irish settlers, blackface minstrel songs, and cowboy ballads. These histories emerge from an idea that Black and white Southerners lived entirely separate lives and developed wholly independent styles of music. Such a notion of distinct and separate musical worlds is false, even as segregation and Jim Crow laws were the lived reality of all these musicians. As musicologist Karl Hagstrom Miller writes, "When black and white southerners danced to the same rhythm, white southerners were almost always calling the tune."²⁵ Before the birth of country or the blues, white enslavers frequently forced Black musicians to entertain them by making music for a white audience in a variety of styles.²⁶ White and Black musicians performed on the minstrel stage in a form created by white performers.²⁷ And both white and Black churches drew from many of the same hymns and hymnals, although they might select different hymns and find different meanings in those hymns.²⁸ Despite the power imbalance, the music of Black and white Southerners developed like a winding river and a braided stream, with many channels merging and diverging from one another. In the South, white and Black Americans lived in close proximity and interacted continually with one another. Their musical activities similarly overlapped, intersected, diverged, and influenced each other.

This musical world of mixture formed the foundation for a Southern wave of popular music in the 1920s. Ralph Peer, a talent scout and recording engineer working for a small label called Okeh Records, produced a wide variety of musical acts—white, Black, Mexican, and mixed-race—for the label. Peer went in search of "authentic" "folk" music, particularly in rural Southern and Appalachian communities. He worked with local radio hosts, record store owners, and others to locate and record musical acts across the United States. He documented string bands, fiddlers, country blues guitarists, vocal groups, choirs, and

preachers giving sermons. Peer ignored instances of rural Southerners singing popular songs from Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, considering such performances inauthentic. He cultivated his own collection (canon) of rural American “folk” music. Of course, Black musicians had been performing and perhaps even recording music that sounded “country” decades before Peer came to Bristol, Tennessee, in 1927. The Bohees, a Black musical group, may have recorded “Banjo Duets” as early as 1890.²⁹

Peer and Okeh’s real innovation, however, was in marketing these songs, and specifically in creating a market divided along racial lines. As the recording industry boomed in the 1920s, Peer recognized that poor white Southerners and first- and second-generation emancipated Black Americans had some money for leisure and a big appetite for new records. Peer and Okeh marketed and sold recordings of Black artists in a variety of styles, primarily to Black audiences under the banner of “race records.” Okeh marketed music by rural white Southerners to other rural white Southerners and labeled this music “old-time” or “hillbilly” music. Despite the musical similarities between race and old-time records, they were sold as part of distinct series. As Peer recalled later,

I saw that this was really a business like our foreign record business. We put out German records, Swedish records and what have you. So I decided that, like the German records were all in let’s say the 6000 series, I said well we need another number series [for race records] so I started using this 8000. That was the theory behind it. . . . And when hillbilly came along and I quickly saw the analogy and I gave that a separate number series almost immediately. The first record was Fiddlin’ John Carson and they were so terrible I just didn’t dare put any of them in the regular list.³⁰

Soon these categories became industry standards.

At the same time, labels still released popular songs in styles that were not marketed to a specific racial group. In essence, a white artist from New York could record a Broadway or other generic popular song, but Black artists were hired only to record songs that sounded identifiably Black—in a blues, spiritual, jazz, or gospel style, etc. Similarly, executives looking for a supposedly authentic American folk tradition had little interest in rural white artists recording from sheet music published in the urban North, even as commercial popular song was part of their musical lives and those of their rural listeners. White Southern artists were similarly expected to sound “white” and local. Any overlap between white and Black rural music-making was thus expunged. By inventing the categories of “race records” and “hillbilly records,” Peer and his contemporaries reshaped the soundscape of rural American music along racial lines. By the

1950s, these terms had been updated and replaced as newer music gained favor. "Race records" became "rhythm and blues," while "old time" became "country."³¹

White record executives, managers, and performers maintained this segregated musical world, even as Black musicians gave voice to country music. For example, Black musicians Lil Hardin Armstrong played piano and her husband, Louis Armstrong, played trumpet on white superstar Jimmie Rodgers's 1930 hit record "Standing on the Corner (Blue Yodel #9)." Radio listeners heard Black musicians, but often they did not realize they were Black. This was the case of multi-instrumentalist DeFord Bailey, an early star of the Grand Ole Opry. Celebrated as a "harmonica wizard," Bailey was a key contributor to the Opry's success when it was a nascent radio show. He was featured on songs such as "Pan-American Blues" or "Fox Chase," mimicking the sounds of a train whistle, the wheels of galloping horses, and hunting calls with a lively syncopated rhythm. Bailey's harmonica was a perfect complement to the "Singing Brakeman" Jimmie Rodgers. Nevertheless, Opry announcers left Bailey's race unmentioned, most likely to avoid letting their white listeners know that the show was racially integrated.³² At the same time, the Grand Ole Opry portrayed itself and country music as white, often featuring caricatured blackface performers as a foil to its regular performers, including Bailey.

Throughout the twentieth century, the border between the white and Black streams of American music-making was porous but clearly defined. These streams joined together most prominently in the late 1940s to create the sound of "rock 'n' roll."³³ Black and white artists found success in this world, giving voice to new styles within a category designated by white executives largely for white audiences. White artists, however, found more economic opportunity crossing over than did Black artists. Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, for example, performed in a Black-inspired rhythm-and-blues style, which would then be marketed as white "rock 'n' roll." Their commercial success far outpaced that of Black musicians such as Fats Domino or Chuck Berry. A signal example is the 12-bar blues song "Hound Dog," which was originally released by the Black blues singer Big Mama Thornton in 1952 and was later covered by Elvis Presley in 1956.³⁴ Both records were hits. Thornton sold 500,000 copies, while Presley sold more than 10 million. (See song biography in chapter 1.)

A power imbalance lies at the heart of cultural appropriation. Record executives controlled the distinction between the musics of Black artists and white artists. Musically, this distinction was often arbitrary and artificial. This boundary was strong enough to deny Black artists opportunity, but porous enough to allow white artists, songwriters, and producers to adopt Black elements, propelling their commercial success. The bluesy vocal harmonies of the Jordanaires on Patsy Cline's "Crazy" owe their sound to the close harmonies of Black jubilee

quartets and doo-wop groups. The rapped verses in Toby Keith's "I Wanna Talk about Me" have more in common with hip-hop than the spoken interludes of a George Jones song. Keith Urban dresses like a rock star, shreds on the electric guitar, and fills songs like "Blue Ain't Your Color" with slow, heavy backbeats reminiscent of an Etta James song. Most recently, the drum machines and drumming patterns of hip-hop appear in songs such as Sam Hunt's "Body Like a Back Road."

Black Song has been a fundamental presence in country music. Perhaps the best-known example is Mississippian Charley Pride. Pride's record label initially sought to keep his racial identity secret, as executives worried about alienating white consumers. Historian Charles L. Hughes notes that Pride was first introduced as "Country Charley Pride" in an attempt to establish his legitimacy as a country artist before his racial identity became better known.³⁵ Other Black artists who found some success in 1960s and 1970s country included O. B. McLinton, Joe Tex, Herb Jeffries, Joe Simon, Stoney Edwards, and Linda Martell. Martell's album *Color Me Country* included the 1970 Billboard chart hit "Color Him Father." Black artists known primarily for their success in blues, soul, and R&B also recorded "country" albums, embracing a hidden component of their musical identity. That list includes Ray Charles's album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* (1962), as well as country records by the Pointer Sisters, Millie Jackson, and Tina Turner. It includes Swamp Dogg (Jerry Williams Jr.), who has been playing, recording, and songwriting for more than fifty years. There is also the songwriting success of Alice Randall, whose credits include "Girls Rides Horses," "Small Towns (Are Smaller for Girls)," and "XXX's and OOO's." Her memoir, *My Black Country*, has been an inspiration for our thinking about country as a broad musical form that transcends narrow racialized marketing strategies. As Randall contends, "Black Country is a big tent with many entry points."³⁶ Randall's country concept makes room for Roberta Flack, Quincy Jones, Bill Withers, and others. She also reminds us that Black musicians have long brought their personal experiences and perspectives to country music. As Randall explains, she writes songs "from a decidedly female, Black, and bookish perspective, troubling the water in ways that mattered to rural Black people."³⁷

Country music institutions have begun to acknowledge the history of Black Americans in the industry. For example, as musicologist Samuel Parler documents, when the Country Music Hall of Fame first considered inducting DeFord Bailey, the suggestion was met with resistance on the grounds that Bailey was not influential enough or that his induction would not draw viewers to the ceremony. It was only after the September 11, 2001, attacks and subsequent critiques of xenophobia, jingoism, and racism in country music that efforts to recognize Bailey reached a tipping point, leading to his induction in 2005. Parler writes:



Fig. 5.3. Rhiannon Giddens singing during a lecture at the University of Michigan, September 2025.

Photo by A.J. Saulsberry, courtesy Penny Stamps Speaker Series, University of Michigan.

In the debates between advocates and skeptics over Bailey's fitness for the Hall of Fame, his musical style and repertoire played a secondary role. . . . Assessing Bailey according to a different set of criteria, even when motivated by progressive ideals, effectively devalued his musicianship.³⁸

In the twenty-first century, as mainstream commentators contend that artists such as Beyoncé and Lil Nas X are suddenly crossing over into country, they fail to recognize that Black people have been playing, singing, and writing country music all along. Those traditions have continued in the music of Mickey Guyton, Rissi Palmer, Adia Victoria, Dom Flemons, Tanner Adell, Justin Robinson, Leyla McCalla, Darius Rucker, Shaboozey, Roberta Lea, Rhiannon Giddens, Laura Love, Amythyst Kiah, and Valerie June, among many others.³⁹ Black artists are working firmly within the tradition of country music, speaking to themes of rural life, Christian faith, working-class experience, family, love, and community that have long been central to the genre. They also incorporate all sorts of sounds and ideas into their work.

Even as many projected an image of country music as white, it has always been diverse. The honky-tonk stylings of Hank Williams combined Hawaiian steel guitar, European yodeling, and African American blues techniques such as pitch bends and blue notes in his first hit, "Lovesick Blues."⁴⁰ White artist Henson Cargill's 1967 number-one country single, "Skip a Rope," called out racism, domestic abuse, and tax evasion.⁴¹ More recently, Mickey Guyton's "All-American" speaks to contemporary political polarization, highlighting a national diversity that embraces the Texas sky and New York City lights, James Brown and James Dean, and jukebox vinyl and hotel Bibles. A similar inclusive spirit shines through in Beyoncé's "Ya Ya," which mixes Linda Martell's voice, honky-tonk or gospel blues-style electric guitar, and jangly acoustic guitars and bells. In addition to the musical style, the lyrics draw on familiar country music themes, including references to being underpaid (working overtime "for half the pay"), to religious faith (a "Bible on the dash"), and to hard life made harder by those with power and wealth (an insurance company that refuses to pay a claim).⁴² "Ya Ya" is a country song through and through.

In light of our discussions of canon, country music offers an important example—as with classical music—of how mainstream, white-dominated institutions and cultural memory ignore the presence and contributions of Black Americans. Moving forward, it is not enough to simply look through the archives and find Black musicians to include on the lists. That results in the same tokenization and flattening that Parler argues fueled the reluctant induction of Bailey into the official canon of country music. A full consideration of all those contributing to a musical style reveals a more complex web of people, each with a stake in its creation and success. Artificial borders—such as Ralph Peer's marketing gimmicks—that segregate music's history must likewise be identified and dismantled. If a canon is to be helpful—if it is simply a guide to "good" music and "important" musicians—it is imperative that we all continue to think about how we make the lists, who is making them, and whether the boundaries around them are real or imagined.

Concluding Thoughts

It remains an open question if and how a canon might function in a just and equitable musical culture. Yet the various musical canons—classical, country, and others—are unlikely to be extinguished or eliminated. A healthy approach to canons, however, is possible. Such an approach would celebrate musical impact across all music and musicians. A healthy canon would continually question its own distortions, incompleteness, prejudices, and blind spots. It would challenge

itself to grow and to seek out new masterworks; it would be an understanding that ever seeks to be deeper and broader, more expansive, and more helpful as a guide to achievement and possibility. Change is possible. No single authority maintains any canon. Canons are created through cultural practice, and thus musical canons can change in real time as musical practice changes. A canon can thus become more healthy, more responsive to new knowledge, and more aware of its own shortcomings and biases. Such a canon would be no less fallible, but it would be more artful, more accurate, and more compelling.

Part III

*Black Song Roadmaps for Performance,
Teaching, and Research*

6: Engaging with Black Song

Seminar Recitals

Key Takeaways

- Seminar recitals are interactive performances that draw from Black musical practices to invite interactions and dialogue among performers, audiences, and music researchers.
- The knowledge shared in seminar recitals created rich and compelling research data, which shaped future recitals and informed this book.
- The venue and participants in a seminar recital affect the experience. Seminar recitals of Black Song can be productively disruptive in predominantly white spaces, while Black performers and audiences can find them familiar and affirming.
- Seminar recitals can be a powerful tool for opening up difficult conversations about race, racism, culture, and history that might not otherwise happen, especially in the classroom.

What Is a Seminar Recital?

This chapter defines and examines one of our primary anti-racist pedagogical interventions—the seminar recital. We developed the concept and coined the term to describe interactive musical performances in which the primary objective is the sharing of knowledge among all participants. Seminar recitals are based on the traditional structure of a lecture recital, in which historical information about music is presented alongside performance of the music discussed. Seminar recitals go further, “breaking the fourth wall” by inviting the audience to share personal reactions, knowledge, perspectives, and interpretations and to discuss with the performers and other audience members the connections among music, culture, history, society, and many other topics. We drew on this notion of the seminar recital to engage audiences in a conversation about Black Song and thus Black experience, past and present. This method of engaged

performance invites all participants to consider how performers, songwriters, composers, lyricists, dancers, audiences, and others contribute to musical experience, knowledge, and meaning. The seminar recital therefore draws on central elements of Black musical participation, such as community-building, embodiment, and participation, concepts we outlined and discussed in the first sections of this book.

When our Singing Justice team initially conceived of the seminar recital, it was a research experiment. We weren't certain what would happen or if the concerts would succeed. We drew on our experiences as performers and teachers, recognizing that live musical performance might be more meaningful for audiences that knew the historical context of a song's creation. We also wanted to know how listeners responded to our performances, especially as our programming asked audiences to confront issues of race so directly. What kinds of emotional responses would our performances elicit? What questions or observations would audiences have as a result? Out of that process, we imagined a seminar recital that would include performance, historical presentation, and dialogue with the audience. Over time, we recognized that we should try out this model with a range of audiences and repertoires. We didn't foresee how dynamic combining performing, teaching, and talking about Black Song would be. We didn't foresee how much we as collaborators—listeners, performers, and facilitators—would learn from each other. Ultimately, we discovered that the seminar recital was a valuable tool for fostering constructive and even reparative conversations about race, justice, and the Black experience.

The foundation of our seminar recitals was the performance of Black Song in a traditional concert format. To that we added layers of activity, including background information on each song, the individual who composed it, its genre and style, and the historical context in which the song was created. We asked the audience to reflect explicitly on their expectations, assumptions, and emotions in real time using a combination of techniques, including anonymous responses to polling questions using their smartphones and inviting them to engage in discussion. These interactions, facilitated by a host or a performer, asked listeners to consider how race intersects with specific elements of each song (lyrics, sound, style) or the performances (the vocalist's and instrumentalists' interpretations) in the manner of a focus group. The background information we presented was tailored to meet the needs of each audience (university students, church audiences, concert series audiences, etc.). The result created a meaningful experience for all participants and generated a rich archive of qualitative and quantitative data for our research.

The seminar recital model has proven central to Singing Justice research outcomes. In combining curated historical information with live performance

of Black Song and inviting our audience to share their experience, we connected to listeners of varying demographic backgrounds and perspectives. We also initiated conversations and even activities (such as communal singing) that were made possible by the power of music. Difficult moments, ranging from uneasiness between audiences and singers to the deeply emotional experiences of the musicians themselves in studying and performing Black Song, could be handled with grace, understanding, and respect because of the empathic environment fostered by the music we experienced together. Black Song, in the context of the seminar recital, became a vehicle to realize, recognize, and process emotions for both audience members and performers. The data gathered demonstrate the ability of the seminar recital format to facilitate difficult but productive conversations.

The seminar recital opens up space for conversations about hard history, such as the history of slavery and racial violence in the United States. Those topics, because their effects are still with us today, can traumatize some in the audience and do harm. These histories are also hard in another sense. Most of us don't know how to engage productively in conversations about racism, violence, and difference. Our contrasting experiences and positions in relation to white supremacy prevent us from having those discussions or even being aware of this history and its legacies into the present. Because so many performers and listeners have strong emotional responses to music, the seminar recital can be a valuable tool in breaking down barriers to empathy and understanding. We found that many audiences—in classrooms, churches, concert halls, and focus groups—warm up and eagerly participate in discussions when there is something approachable and engaging, like music, to jump-start discussion. Audiences seem less guarded and more open to talking about what they are hearing and the emotions they feel. People respond to lyrics, vocal style, instruments, rhythms, grooves, the other people in the room, and all the other elements that go into a musical performance.

The Concert Hall as a White Space

After presenting seminar recitals in a range of venues and for a variety of audiences, we have discovered that its three components—performance, historical context, and audience interaction—elicit provocative conversation and personal reflection. Listeners frequently have their assumptions challenged, particularly in spaces such as the classical concert hall where it is the norm to hear music by European composers performed mostly by white performers for mostly white audiences. We have also found that seminar recitals of Black Song with Black, as well as non-Black, performers propel conversations about challenging themes

like appropriation and permission. In spaces where we brought Black Song to predominantly Black audiences, we found audiences that were highly engaged and eager to have conversations about the music as well other issues relating to its respectful performance.

Seminar recitals widen the lens of performers and audiences alike to normalize the presence of Black voices on the concert stage. Black musicians have been making what could be called classical music since the beginnings of the genre. There are accounts of Black musicians writing and performing music in the style of their white peers going back at least to Vincente Lusitano in the sixteenth century. Yet despite the achievements of European Black composers such as Ignatius Sancho, Joseph Bologne, José Silvestre White, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and others, tastemakers and institutions increasingly defined classical music as white, especially in the nineteenth century and later. In the United States, Black Americans met barriers to accessing classical music instruction and performance spaces. Claims that classical music is “universal” or racially neutral create barriers by erasing identity. Within an overwhelmingly white space, this concept leads its adherents to pretend not to see race. Because of this, historically and presently, introducing Black perspectives in the concert hall—by singing about Black life or drawing on musical styles associated with Black music—disrupts common understandings in classical music. Black Song compels audiences to confront the whiteness of the concert hall, and then to realize that this space, too, can become a Black Space.

One of our collaborators, Louise Toppin, has built a long and successful career as an opera singer, concert soloist, and a voice pedagogue. She brought her experiences and ambitions as a Black vocalist of more than 30 years to our collective, providing firsthand insights to the challenges and opportunities of bringing Black Song back to classical music.

As a young singer, stepping onto a stage to sing Black Song represented a distinct departure from my performance training. Presenting this repertoire was freeing and gave me a sense of pride as I shared not only my vocal talents but my cultural identity as well. In opera productions, the objective is to de-emphasize who we are as individual singers and instead embody a new character. In a concert setting, however, we have an opportunity to personalize what we sing and tell our story through our musical choices. My choices allowed me to sing repertoire that explored the history of African Americans and other marginalized communities, thereby teaching history to audiences who attended performances for entertainment. This necessitated delivering/teaching this history in both Black spaces (i.e., churches, community centers, and HBCUs) and non-Black spaces (i.e., predominantly white institutions, concert series, and concert halls). Producing a successful program that

achieved these multiple goals of entertainment and teaching history through song in the early 1990s meant learning an enormous body of repertoire and engaging with an audience in a new way that didn't have a codified term at the time. The academy now calls it "engaged scholarship."

My goal was to reach specific minority communities that had never been considered viable concert patrons, to create programming in THEIR spaces rather than assuming they would come to traditional (white) concert spaces, and to help them feel seen in an art form that had excluded their words and experiences previously. My programs included repertoire such as spirituals, African American art songs, African American arias, and songs of the Black diaspora. I consciously engaged with the audience by moving away from printed program notes and taking a more personal approach to speaking in conversation with the audience. Talking provided background information and context for understanding the music during the concert. Stimulating post-concert conversations let me know that the presentations were not only instructive to the audience but provided an approach that invited a deeply personal connection and pride in the history and music they were hearing. As I reflect on these programs, I measure the success by the number of patrons who continue to contact me, follow my career, and participate in my concerts.

Seminar Recitals in Concert Halls

Duke University, Durham, NC

The seminar recital we performed at Duke University on October 22, 2022, combined the emotional experience of hearing repertoire that addressed challenging issues around race with an environment that invited thoughtful discussions. Hosted by the Duke Music Department's Black Music Lab, the recital included contextualizing commentary and some new innovations, such as small group discussion among audience members comparing the different settings of the James Weldon Johnson poem "Sence you went away."¹ We then asked these groups to tell us how they responded to the music and to the historical experience embodied in the music. The program also included short interviews with poets, composers, and performers (singers and dancers) featured during the concert, which provided opportunities for the largely Black audience to speak directly to us as artists during the concert, thereby integrating them more fully into the concert experience. After the concert, Black Music Lab co-director and music professor, Anthony Kelley, said of the performance, "It was a transformative experience" and that our seminar recital represented "a new paradigm for how one presents a concert of Black music."²

North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC

On October 16, 2023, we presented a seminar recital in a Black space, North Carolina Central University (NCCU), a historically Black university in Durham. The virtually 100% African American audience featured many NCCU students, some faculty, and a few community members. Our Singing Justice contingent included seven presenters: team members Naomi André, Tyrese Byrd, Caroline Helton, Louise Toppin, and Samantha Williams, joined by guest soprano Colleen Beucher and pianist Joshua Marzan. The seminar recital followed our typical mix of remarks, survey questions, and performance, featuring a mix of classical songs and spiritual settings.

The recital was progressing in expected fashion until the last song before intermission. At that point, Beucher, our white soprano, sang a lyric that referred specifically to Blackness (“night coming tenderly, Black, like me” from *Dream Variations* by Langston Hughes). Earlier in the program she had performed a song with a Louisiana creole text, “Gardé Piti Mulet Là,” [“Look at that little mulatto there”], as well as a spiritual. During intermission, we got word that students were “having some feelings” and were anxious to talk about the fact that a white singer had crossed the color barrier. We had not planned for a discussion segment during this concert because we were already scheduled to present a workshop the next day to many of the same students. To address the audience’s strong reactions, however, we announced that a Q&A would follow the last piece on the program. Despite their emotional reactions during intermission, we didn’t lose any audience members for the second half of the program. All returned and continued to listen attentively.

After the concert’s conclusion, Toppin and André started the conversation by eliciting general responses about songs that lacked racially specific texts. These were complimentary and positive. Toppin and André then asked about the audience’s reactions to hearing the spiritual settings. Audience members were initially reluctant to express any negative reactions, until one of them asked, “Can I be honest?” Once we assured them that we wanted their honest responses, we engaged in a long and lively dialogue about Black Song and who has permission to sing it. For the student audience members, it was an opportunity to share and work through their emotions. They offered candid responses and worked hard to express how they felt, to process those feelings, and to listen to their peers grapple with the same experience, each with their own perspective. Once their feelings were acknowledged, they could take a step back and consider the source of those feelings and relate it back to the performance. For example, one audience member who was also a singer said that this was the first time she had heard a spiritual performed by a non-Black singer. She felt that a white singer

could walk with her and be supportive but wouldn't be able to experience important aspects of living as an African American. On the other hand, she said that as a Black singer she knows French arias weren't written for her, but she still sings them; there was a palpable pause as she acknowledged her conflicting feelings. Another audience member complimented Beucher's execution but commented that it was a mental struggle to hear a white performer say "Black, like me." This was a powerful moment, as many others in the room felt the same way but had not yet found the words (or courage) to say it. Another audience member said that although the white soprano's performance was beautiful, she felt more comfortable when one of the Black singers performed a spiritual. Many in the audience also remarked that it was clear that Beucher had done the work with the dialect and executed it very well, but it still seemed strange.³ Clearly the audience was struggling. At that point, Beucher thoughtfully entered the conversation; she revealed that it had been very intimidating to sing this repertoire for a Black audience, even when she knew that she had worked very hard to treat the dialect with respect. Williams, our Black mezzo-soprano, then made the point that no one questions a Black singer who performs with the dialect.

Toppin and André intervened with some concluding remarks and questions. In terms of sensitivity and education, there are many spirituals and Black art songs that work well for all singers to perform. As these Black Songs are part of our musical heritage in the United States, it makes sense for everyone to be able to embrace and engage with them. However, some lyrics can cause confusion and hurt. Songs with lyrics such as "Black, like me" might best be left for those who are Black. Additionally, it is important for all vocalists to learn how to sing these songs respectfully and with sensitivity, no matter their racial identity. This repertoire is our American heritage, and we need to be able to pass it on to future generations, Black and white.

The conversation continued for over an hour, even after a long concert. Everyone clearly felt the music was powerful and relished the opportunity to unpack their reactions in dialogue with others expressing differing opinions. An important aspect was that young people in the audience were encouraged to be honest in their responses, and that all performers, including the white ones, listened, accepted feedback, and shared what it was like for them to perform this music for a Black audience. Non-Black performers did not take offense to criticism, and the audience engaged with them in open conversation. Additional key factors included that we were a multiracial group, that we responded directly to audience questions and concerns, and that we returned the next day for an in-class workshop. It was a long night filled with glorious singing and some difficult moments fraught with tension. Yet it was necessary work to create an environment in which we could support the singers, educate the audience and

ourselves, and nurture a community to connect more deeply to the music we all love and respect.

Singing Justice Conference, Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (State University for Music and Performing Arts), Stuttgart, Germany

The international reach of our team resulted in the opportunity to present a seminar recital in Stuttgart, Germany, November 5, 2022. Our guest performers for this performance were two European-based, non-American professional singers: British-Russian baritone Theodore Platt and Chilean-German soprano Carolina Ullrich. They joined tenor Tyrese Byrd from the Singing Justice Collective. Presenting a seminar recital in Europe offered a fascinating exercise in leaving behind the complex racial and cultural baggage of the United States while entering a culture with limited experience with Black Song, especially in a concert setting. For example, our preconcert survey revealed that 93% of respondents selected blues (closely followed by jazz and spirituals) as a genre of music they associate with Black American singers, songwriters, composers, and musicians. Only 14% of respondents associated Black composers and performers with classical music. Given that the training for German singers rarely includes English-language repertoire, much less American song, our guest singers entered unfamiliar territory. However, they took the job of learning about style and dialect seriously. Both non-American singers participated in a master class before their performance of Black Song at the seminar recital, impressing our Singing Justice group with their interest in Black Song and their willingness to engage with cultural humility.

Theodore Platt, for example, stepped into the concert opportunity at the last minute due to a cancellation and expressed immediate skepticism about his qualifications as a white man to sing Hall Johnson's spiritual arrangement "My Good Lord Done Been Here." This spiritual arrangement includes dialect from the period of enslavement. Despite his young if already distinguished career, he admitted that this would be his first time singing a spiritual and that he feared enacting cultural appropriation.

Team member Christie Finn connected Theo with Louise Toppin and Caroline Helton for individual conversations about issues of performance, race, and dialect. Finn wrote Platt this explanation:

It is the opinion of the many experts in our collective (and outside of it) that the stories and music of African American spirituals belong to all of us as world heritage treasures and should be widely performed. It is also the group opinion that dialect

can be studied and learned just like any other language. . . . Singing in dialect, with the right research, motivation and execution, is a show of respect to the origins of this music and the people for whom it may have represented the difference between life and death. To have the performance of this music restricted to only singers of color is a loss to the overall human historical narrative and continues to marginalize music that should be part of every singer's training and every performance venue's programming.

The line of communication was opened, and Toppin worked with Platt over Zoom on dialect pronunciation. When he arrived at the master class, the day before his seminar recital performance, he was eager to perform “My Good Lord Done Been Here” and gain feedback from Helton and African American tenor Ray M. Wade Jr. To overcome his self-consciousness, Helton reminded him that when singing a spiritual, he was not singing the song as an individual but rather as a group member. The group’s support was implicit in using call-and-response musical formulations, and he could draw on the group’s strength as he performed. This thought allowed him to decenter himself as the performer and engage his energy more generously toward the audience.

Seminar Recitals in White, Black, and Racially Mixed Churches

In churches, where music links to both emotion and communal worship, the contextual information and dialogue opportunities provided by the seminar recital model made the experience especially meaningful for audiences. By drawing attention to the deep, everyday religious meaning of spirituals as well as their origin and function within enslaved communities, the seminar recital produced emotional revelations among Black and white congregants alike, as well as feelings of validation among Black congregants. And since many churches engage in community outreach as social justice allies, our recitals highlighted a musical link between Black and white communities. Our performances seemed able to move communities to greater racial harmony, both figuratively and literally. Because churches can be among the most segregated spaces in our society, Singing Justice team members Helton and Williams crafted programs consisting of African American spirituals, which are part of the US Christian worship experience for both Black and white congregations, especially in the South.

Both Williams and Helton are from Virginia, and both grew up singing spirituals. They created and performed an intimate seminar recital at several churches in Virginia that provided an opportunity for a relatively free exchange of conversation. The program created a space for choir members and congregants to discuss their knowledge of and emotional connection to spirituals. Hel-



Fig. 6.1. Dr. Joyce Garrett (Director of Music and Worship Arts at Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia) with Singing Justice members Samantha Rose Williams (center) and Caroline Helton (right).

Photo by Samantha Williams.

ton and Williams sought out a variety of churches with congregations that varied demographically: (1) all-white congregations, (2) historically and predominantly Black congregations, and (3) racially mixed congregations. Despite the diversity of churches, each has its own history and relationship with performing African American spirituals. Helton and Williams described their experience.

We left space for discussion and sharing personal stories about spirituals in between our solo performances. We also included group singing of spiritual hymns and

some originally white gospel songs that are beloved and claimed by Black congregations. Our live performances and communal singing, combined with opportunities for dialogue, allowed for a rich conversation that revealed strong emotional responses, attesting to the affinity these groups felt with the music.

The racially mixed congregation at Cave Spring Methodist Church in Roanoke, Virginia, held varying levels of knowledge about the provenance of spirituals, ranging from no experience to very well informed. In fact, two Black congregants in the otherwise all-white group came with printed resources to ensure we were providing accurate information. The pair spoke with great pride about the legacy of Black resilience and faith that spirituals carry. Their fellow choristers learned a lot from them that day.

We also brought this seminar recital to a predominantly Black congregation, Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Tracing its origins to the early nineteenth century, this church was the first Black Baptist Church north of Richmond. It is also where Williams's mother is a pastor. The all-Black audience welcomed Williams, Helton, and their white pianist, Mark Moorman. It was a deeply moving experience to be in a church of such historic importance, a Black Space where the significance of spirituals is palpable. One audience member became very emotional as we were discussing concert settings of spirituals, speaking of how she felt that her music was being taken away from her by the classical treatment their Black arrangers had employed. Helton described her experience of one such reaction following her performance of "City Called Heaven," set by Hall Johnson:

It was not that she was upset that a white person was singing spirituals, but that the musical language of the song was European/classical. After sitting with her reaction for a moment and allowing for its impact on our presentation, I responded that I hoped that the fact that all the settings we had chosen were by African American composers could give her a way into this musical language and that, hopefully, she could hear the composers' reactions to the emotional content of the original spirituals in their settings. She spoke with me after the presentation and told me that she didn't even know she felt that way until it came out of her mouth in the moment. It's clear that mockery, appropriation, and thoughtless usage of these beloved and life-sustaining songs have caused a lot of pain to African Americans, and it's also clear that expressing that pain was pretty eye-opening and maybe cathartic for her. It took a lot of trust for her to express herself honestly in that setting.

As a white person entering a Black space, I was welcomed, encouraged, and taken seriously as a human being who is deeply affected by spirituals and was seeking to perform them with context and respect. That cultural and personal generosity is something that I will never forget.

At First Christian Church in Falls Church, Virginia, the all-white choir's proud theme song is the spiritual "Ain't Got Time to Die." The choir has a tradition of singing choral spirituals dating back to the 1970s and early 1980s when they recorded an album of these songs.⁴ They have actively worked with Black music specialists from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC, to respectfully and accurately prepare the choral spiritual arrangements for such recordings. The singers told stories of their lifelong connection to spirituals and expressed their internal struggles and unanswered questions about performance practice, permission, and unintentional harm. One man who had performed spirituals in an all-white quartet when he was younger expressed strong feelings of guilt over whether he had done harm by performing them without understanding or acknowledging the history of this music. It made a difference to have Williams there to respond from an African American perspective and for us to have the time and emotional space needed to unpack that guilt and give the group some more nuanced viewpoints to consider when making the case for their choice to sing spirituals.

Discussion allowed Williams and Helton to share the performance practice and vocal training that were evident in their performance of spirituals. Williams conveyed the distinct ways that spirituals were taught and performed in the Black Space of her church, and she invited the white choral members to join her in singing a spiritual a cappella. Williams gave the following account of this interaction:

I shared a lot about the way I grew up learning these spirituals in my church's gospel choir. A young singer with a big voice, I was moved from the teen choir to the senior [adult] choir in my sophomore year of high school where I found myself surrounded by the seasoned saints (50+) singers at Alfred Street Baptist Church. In the senior choir we had the respected and accomplished choir director Joyce Garret who was an amazingly talented and no-nonsense director that we adored and feared equally. I don't remember ever receiving sheet music for any of the songs we sang. Instead, Dr. Garret in all her 5-foot-tall glory would play the chords on the piano while pointing at each section in turn. She would sing our parts one at a time (moving from Soprano 1 to Bass) effortlessly and we would all do our best to memorize the words, pitches, tone, and diction, all by ear. If we were lucky, she'd give us the lyrics printed on a sheet of paper. This method of learning meant that we had to work together to learn our parts. Those of us who were quick at memorizing the vocal lines would hum to each other within our sections as the director worked with other sections so that we would all be prepared when she came back to us. Clapping from various choir members would help us keep the beat and remind us of cut-offs so that we wouldn't be the odd man out, singing through an unwritten rest.

I explained all this to the choir at First Christian Church and could see their eyes widening with understanding. But when at the end of the recital I asked them to sing “This Little Light of Mine” with me, they gripped the sheet music tightly in their hands, until we reached a verse that I grew up singing that wasn’t on the sheet music. I could sense the nervousness and uncertainty when they noticed that they couldn’t follow me from the paper. Slowly they stumbled into the very same practices of call and response, learning by ear, and relying on the individual strengths of different choir members to collectively perform the work. It completely changed the way they performed the song, and it started to sound more like the style of singing I was accustomed to hearing growing up. It was less about singing it “right” and more about the collective spiritual experience, and it seemed like an eye-opening moment for the choir, who hadn’t fully understood the distinction until they embodied it themselves.

The key to success for this series of seminar recitals lay in the powerful example of interracial participation using music as a catalyst for dialogue. Still, we also realized that successful dialogue depended on a sense of mutual respect and trust between audience and performers. We discovered the emotional impact of spirituals for both Black and white Southerners, the depth of unquestioned white assumptions, and productive ways to get white people to become aware of those assumptions. Overall, it was a deeply meaningful experience in which we were able to unpack the nuances of what spirituals mean to each of us and to use the singing of this powerful and beloved body of Black Song as a tool to bring people together.

Seminar Recitals in the Classroom

We presented seminar recitals for three classes of undergraduate students taught by our team members at the University of Michigan in the 2022–2023 academic year. These courses featured a range of class sizes, topics, and disciplines. One was an introductory course in African American Studies in the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies taught by Naomi André and consisting of about 25 liberal arts students. Another was a large survey course on US Southern history in the Departments of History and American Culture taught by Stephen Berrey with about 175 students. The third class was a survey course on US music taught by Mark Clague. Part of the required history sequence for music majors at U-M’s School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD), this class enrolled about 100 students. Our recitals fit the pedagogical goals of each course, and enrolled students became the recital audience as part of their classroom experience. Some instructors provided preparatory readings. Others



Fig. 6.2. Singers and a backing band in a popular music seminar recital performing the song “Respect” by Otis Redding as arranged for Aretha Franklin, in a class taught by Mark Clague at the University of Michigan, March 28, 2022.

Photo by Mark Clague.

placed the concerts within the course chronology, such as for a unit on the civil rights era. Participating students signed a permission form allowing their contributions to become part of our study. For each recital, talented undergraduate vocalists and instrumentalists in SMTD performed the music.

As an intervention combining Black music and Black history, we envisioned our classroom seminar recital as a model for the complexities of teaching both subjects. Our performances brought together Black Song, historical context, and audience-performer dialogues. We introduced each recital by emphasizing the importance of knowing a song’s historical context so that it could open multiple pathways of listening. Then the live experience of the song itself demonstrated how music could create space for dialogues about race, gender, class, resistance, appropriation, protest, joy, memory, community, and identity—to name only a few possible topics. Music proved to be an accessible way into these often challenging histories. Because of its emotional layer, Black Song also promotes empathy as the listener navigates difficult topics, such as racism. As one student noted after hearing our performance of “Strange Fruit,” an anti-lynching

song, “This [song’s] imagery is very troublesome but is necessary to get the feeling across to the listener.”⁵ Another student concluded about the full program that “though some songs were emotionally heavy, the impact and legacy of this music and the civil rights movement is of much more importance than feeling uncomfortable or sad for a bit.”

Two separate programs were presented in all three classes. The first contained solo spiritual settings and African American classical songs performed by students in the African American Art Song course taught by Louise Toppin at SMTD. The second program featured popular music, rhythm and blues, rock, and show tunes by Caroline Helton’s students in musical theatre. Between songs on both programs, Singing Justice team members presented a Power-Point presentation with images, lyrics, and historical details about each song, including who wrote it and when and why it was written. Each introduction was approximately five minutes long. In advance of the recital, students answered an online questionnaire about their musical background and preferences, along with questions about what they knew about Black Song across genres. During the performance, listeners answered short poll questions through their smartphones. All the questionnaires and polls were anonymous. All recital participants (listeners and performers) participated in a post-show Q&A. Often audience questions developed into discussions among the performers, including the singers and accompanying instrumentalists.

After each concert, instructors asked students to write short essays reflecting on the experience. We gathered written responses from the performers as well. We thus observed a powerful effect when student listeners felt a strong connection to their peers as performers. The recital offered an emotional journey that articulated course learning goals. One student wrote,

While discussing the concert, both of us [the writer and a classmate] assumed the other would be most enamored with the incredible voices of the artists and the high-tempo nature of the songs. And while each singer and musician was outrageously talented, the first thing we brought up to each other was the diverse messages provided during the concert. It wasn’t necessarily that the performers delivered powerful songs with harsh imagery or iconic songs from the R&B/soul era—it was the synthesis of the two that struck us so much. That rollercoaster of emotions distinguished that concert from any performance either of us had ever heard and is why we’re still talking about it weeks afterward.

This reflection shows how students responded to the music’s intense emotional and political meanings through civil rights songs such as “Ain’t Gonna

Let Nobody Turn Us Around” and iconic R&B/soul songs, such as “Respect.” Students linked the emotions they felt to the messages of the songs: “It was the synthesis of the two that struck us so much.”

Of the songs that were performed, “Strange Fruit” elicited many responses from the students. During the recital, Singing Justice team member Traci Lombré provided context for Billie Holiday’s iconic performance of the song and for Abel Meeropol, a white Jewish songwriter who wrote the music and lyrics to protest lynching. After the performance, the students were asked to consider whether this knowledge about the writer had affected their response. Roughly three-fourths of the students responded that it did, as the following student attests:

The haunting imagery invoked by Kate Louissaint’s “Strange Fruit” performance was somehow made even more powerful, knowing that Russian Jewish New Yorker Abel Meeropol authored the song. Disaffection and apathy towards Black plight seem commonplace even in post-racial America, making it especially touching to discover one of American history’s most powerful melodic narratives about racism was not authored by a Black person. I think music makes it easy for people to connect beyond culture, race, or other surface-level differences. However, when faced with such disaffection and apathy in reality, one might wonder how sympathetic a white person can be to Black people’s struggles. According to [Autumn Huerter—from a reading for the course], “Music is an essential element of culture. Sharing music from one culture to another gives people an insight into another way of life. This is even more crucial during times of conflict when other methods of interaction are rendered impractical.”⁶ Had the presentation during the concert not included the origins of Meeropol, I would have never guessed a non-Black person created it. It is quite compelling how he was able to create such beautiful imagery through empathy.

Additionally, the experience of hearing the song performed live had a powerful impact:

One piece that stood out to me from the program was “Strange Fruit” . . . by Abel Meeropol. Although I’ve heard this piece several times through recordings, this was the first time I experienced it live. It was a completely different experience being in person and listening to “Strange Fruit,” as I could feel myself physically getting chills from the gorgeous musical line that contrasted so sharply with the violent nature of the lyrics. I think that in the past when I’ve listened to the song, I hadn’t really paid much attention to the lyrics because I didn’t remember it to be so impactful and shocking. However,

hearing it live, when every word was perfectly clear and nuanced, definitely gave me a fresh perspective on the piece.

This student and others found that live performance pulled the listener into difficult topics and intensified emotional connection. Thus, even as we were teaching about song and history, live performance was especially suited to promoting empathy.

“Hound Dog” was another song that generated a great deal of student response. “Hound Dog” was one of Elvis Presley’s biggest hits in 1956, but it was first recorded by the Black woman blues singer, Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton, four years earlier. Two white professional songwriters, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, are credited with writing the song. The original lyrics of “Hound Dog” performed by Thornton clearly describe a woman singing about her no-good man. She is suspicious of his intentions, questions his sincerity, and decides to take a stand, singing that she is done. This song intersects with issues of cultural appropriation, financial reward, and cultural credit. Presley, Leiber, and Stoller all made much more money and acquired much more fame from it than did Thornton. Students were unaware that Thornton had previously performed this song. (See the song biography in chapter 1.)

The seminar recital included performances of both versions, which varied stylistically and lyrically. Students were intrigued by the performative differences in these renditions, responding that the performer’s race and gender transformed the meaning of the song and influenced their emotional reaction. As one student wrote in a reflection essay,

Learning about the history behind [“Hound Dog”] opened my eyes to how big a difference racism and sexism could play in one’s success in life. I was shocked to see the message of the song in the second version take a shallow turn. It’s shameful that Big Mama Thornton could amazingly sing a lyrically awesome song called “Hound Dog,” and I would have never even heard it if not for this concert.

Another student commented after the seminar recital, that he had heard “Hound Dog” before but never paid much attention to the lyrics. Hearing the two versions back to back led him to realize how strange and nonsensical the lyrics were in Presley’s version. With the performances of “Hound Dog,” we provided a concrete example of appropriation and of the ways that lyrics, styles, and performers can influence the meaning of a song.⁷

A unifying element of our seminar recitals was our use of ethnically diverse performers. This strategy encouraged listeners to grapple with questions of

whether a performer's race would affect their reaction to the music. Approximately 60% of the students said that the performer's race did influence their reaction. With a significant percentage believing that the performer's race didn't matter, there was an opportunity for a conversation about what they saw and heard and what they thought about songs addressing the Black experience. One question generating interesting results asked whether students were surprised to hear non-Black singers performing in Black dialect, often a sore spot connected to the legacy of blackface minstrelsy. Roughly two-thirds of the audience answered "yes," and about one-third responded "no." Those responses created space to discuss the complex and often troubling history of dialect.

Students also responded to specific elements of the performances themselves. Hearing their peers perform relevant music reinforced class material, such as readings and lectures about Black life, segregation, and the civil rights movement. They also noted how these performances provided powerful and relevant lenses for understanding ideas in their courses. For example, one student wrote,

It wasn't until we heard songs performed by Black students that we truly internalized the messages we've discussed in class. Not only did the performance supplement our understanding of African American struggles in the twentieth century, but it actively enriched it.

This effect was not limited to the student listener. Our performers also reflected on the meaning of their involvement. Several of the Black singers expressed their nuanced reactions to the music, including how performing Black Song gave them an outlet for contextualizing or understanding historical and contemporary trauma. For example, the following is an African American performer's comment about singing the spiritual "Watch and Pray," a sorrow song by Undine Smith Moore about a young, enslaved child and mother worrying that they will be sold. (See the song biography in chapter 3.)

The three songs I sang really took me on an emotional journey of my own. "Watch and Pray" by Moore has a way of stirring deep, untapped emotions within me. At times, my soul tries hard to disconnect from the words because of the reality of the trauma my ancestors faced. Singing spirituals is about so much more than just the notes on the page. For me, singing spirituals is the only time I truly feel at home. The rhythms, harmonies, and melodies just make sense to me. It is a very odd juxtaposition to feel at home when singing spirituals but also feel deeply troubled and misunderstood.

As much as the polls and written reflections helped us understand student perspectives related to race and representation, they also proved useful for thinking about the questions we posed. A student in Mark Clague's course responded at length after hearing Louise Toppin's racially diverse class of singers perform.

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to all the songs that were performed that morning. And with the poll we took after each segment, I was forced to think about my prejudices and opinions toward how we respect the music performed and honor those stories we sing about. If you would have asked my pre-college self my opinion on non-Black or non-POCs singing this kind of repertoire or spirituals, I would have given a closed-minded hard no. But I can now say that is not my opinion anymore. I haven't figured it out, but I'm working on my own conclusion as to what I view as the right thing to do in regard to this kind of music outreach. This collegiate environment has given me the knowledge to do so, and I hope others find their way into those spaces as well in order to be people of thought and inquiry. That is how we will most effectively respect and honor this music.

As this student's response indicates, music in context served as a productive teaching tool. The student took away not so much a singular way to understand the music and history, but rather a desire to continue to think about these issues and to reflect on their own assumptions.

When we presented the first program of classical songs and spirituals by Black composers in these classes, the combination of live performance and anonymous polling allowed us to gather students' honest reactions, free from peer influence (which becomes a factor when students are asked to raise their hands and share their opinions with an entire class). The data from our polls showed that almost all students thought spirituals remained relevant today. Many reactions were nuanced. Students voiced a range of reactions influenced by course subject matter, the singers' ethnicity, and lyrical content. One student reflected on how he might have reacted differently if the performance circumstances had been different:

I do believe that in a setting like this, where the performance is educational and purpose-driven, it makes sense for non-Black performers to be performing these pieces. However, in a regular setting on any other day, I would likely take issue with a non-Black performer doing a spiritual or African American art piece. I believe that the most interesting component of the class recital was the polling questions, specifically because of the deeper thoughts it drew

out of me when being asked about these songs and them being performed by non-Blacks in African / African American dialect.

In addition to the seminar recitals at our home institution, as previously noted we also performed a seminar recital in concert at North Carolina Central University. That concert was followed the next morning by an interactive seminar-recital workshop crafted by team member Samantha Williams. “What Is Black Song” was an extension of the previous day’s discussion that invited students to challenge their assumptions and create nuanced responses to questions concerning music and race. Students reported that they had remained in conversation many hours after the previous night’s concert, and one said that throughout the night he had mulled over the issues raised. In defining Black Song, these students did not rule out songs that did not “sound Black” or did not arise from Black origins. As long as there was a vital connection to Black experience, or it was written by a Black creator, or it was performed by Black singers, they were open to calling it Black Song. They agreed that the intention behind the work was most important.

Williams wove songs from many genres into her presentation, and led a discussion about “Strange Fruit,” talking about her own grappling with how to best include songs that had been popularized by Black singers but written by non-Black composers:

“Strange Fruit” has had a huge impact on me as a Black person, and I want to be able to sing about that and have a conversation about that time in the civil rights movement and . . . so I think it absolutely can’t be done in a way that doesn’t acknowledge the fact that the writer isn’t Black. But I’m personally interested in how performers in the Black tradition are able to make something a Black Song as well, as in Dolly Parton’s song “I Will Always Love You” that Whitney Houston covered and made REALLY famous as a Black Song.

Students chimed in affirmatively, discussing how Black singers can coauthor songs through their embodied performances. One example given was that when a Black singer’s vocal effects, riffs, or improvisations become standard practice in a song’s performance, that song becomes a “Black Song.” Students discussed Parton’s “I Will Always Love You” at length, trying to articulate exactly how Houston’s performance made the song her own.

Williams explained that an expansive view of Black Song made room to interrogate the shades of gray intrinsic in the social constructions of race and Blackness. She acknowledged that since there were many ways to be Black, there could be many different views on what constituted Black Song. Contention arose

over the question of who has the authority to decide whether something is or isn't an "authentic" Black Song. Some students expressed a desire to reach a clear consensus on what Black Song is, in what contexts someone who is not Black could sing Black Song, and what qualifications they would need to prove they could be trusted with Black cultural capital. These students were concerned that outsiders could abuse the grace being extended by a more expansive definition and could cause harm. This led to a lively debate. A provocative issue arose when someone reflected that students who spent more time in racially mixed spaces seemed more willing to entertain the more open framework, while students who spent the majority of time in homogeneously Black spaces tended to be more concerned with appropriation and disengaged engagement (listeners enjoying a song without considering the contexts and traditions behind it). Students seemed especially engaged in the classroom workshop and played an active role in shaping the discussion. Our goal was not to convince students that our opinions were the "correct" ones or to create a single definition of Black Song but instead was centered on helping students engage thoughtfully with alternative points of view.

7: Black Song as an Anti-Racist Tool for Teaching and Learning

Key Takeaways

- Black Song is a valuable tool in teaching about Black life and culture and in teaching “hard history,” including blackface minstrelsy and racial violence.
- Teaching Black classical music offers important opportunities to correct the exclusion of Black composers from the canon while teaching important music fundamentals.
- Teaching about the music of the Black church invites students to consider the meaning and power of music in specific contexts and spaces and how those meanings change as the music moves into new spaces.
- The Singing Down the Barriers Institute follows a holistic approach that acknowledges and unpacks barriers of understanding and ambivalence while educating singers of all ethnic backgrounds about how to enter the space of classical Black Song with respect and knowledge.

Teaching Black Song

If, as we suggest, Black Song is in the broadest sense a musical exploration of the Black experience, then one might ask, what does the music, or a particular Black Song, reveal about the Black experience? Conversely, what might Black experience reveal about the music? These are musical and historical questions relevant to students and practitioners of music, history, and many other related disciplines. One of the central goals of our work has been to draw on Black Song as an educational resource that can be used by educators in the classroom, as well as by facilitators in churches or other community spaces, to teach about the lives, history, culture, and institutions of Black people and our world.

Up front, we reiterate a principle that might feel like a cliché but is nonetheless true: there is no single, monolithic Black experience, just as there is no unified white, Asian, male, queer, or disabled experience. We recognize that all identity categories are heterogeneous and capacious. Nonetheless, overlapping sets of experiences within each of these groups can communicate helpful information to those who want to act in coalition and understand shared realities within and across groups. In our interracial and multigenerational Singing Justice Collective, we developed a pedagogy built on mutual respect and shared vulnerability that has shaped our approach to Black music and history.

Despite the diversity of Black experiences, Black music and Black life have always been intertwined. When paired, they provide valuable learning opportunities. In teaching about music, identifying the historical context behind a song does more than add color or interesting detail. It helps listeners understand the music, its meanings, and its origins. Thinking about music and history together allows us to listen in interlocking time zones of past and present, as we bring our own experience to the interpretation while taking into account the original context. A song carries multiple meanings of poetic and sonic layers over time. Hearing it fresh as listeners creates new relevance in the present.

In teaching history, music can be a valuable resource. More than reflecting a moment, music is a historical agent. For example, popular songs such as Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," Nina Simone's "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black," and James Brown's "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)," as well as the songs sung by protesters, such as "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize," and "We Shall Overcome," all played important parts in the quest for civil rights.¹ More recently, Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," Janelle Monáe's "Hell You Talmbout," and J. Cole's "Be Free," have been sources of community and strength within the Black Lives Matter movement.²

In the classroom, music serves as a productive way to teach "hard history," including topics related to racism and violence.³ It is critical for all of us to know these histories, but this material may distress some students and lead others to feel uncomfortable. For example, talking about the history of lynching makes many of us—teachers and students—feel uncomfortable, and indeed it should. In addition, for some, it evokes connections to ongoing acts of violence, and it may remind them of their own or their family's vulnerability today. The past can be painful and traumatizing when the legacies of that past endure into the present. Yet because these legacies persist and shape our contemporary world, it is important to learn these hard histories. At the same time, the material must be approached with care. Music provides a productive way into these difficult topics. On an emotional level, music can provide a gentler entry than other his-

torical artifacts, and it can help students process emotions of pain, despair, loss, and fear.

This chapter outlines how our pedagogical interventions in music can be used to meet anti-racist learning goals. We explore Black Song and its related ideas, practices, and themes that can be marshaled to teach hard history. We focus on blackface minstrelsy, the history of Black classical music, and the connection between the civil rights movement and the Black church (see related material in chapter 4). These examples offer productive avenues for students to think about music and history together. Teaching about blackface minstrelsy, for example, offers an opportunity to use music to address racism historically and to trace its legacy into the present. Teaching about Black classical music challenges received wisdom about what is worthy of study, probes a rich and perhaps unexpected world, and reckons with why Black classical music has not been taught. Teaching the connection between Black churches and civil rights shines a light on cultural politics and how music accelerated, shaped, and supported social change. We conclude with a section that describes the philosophy, goals, and methods of the Singing Down the Barriers Institute, a pedagogical initiative dedicated to opening the world of African American classic song to performers of all ethnic backgrounds.⁴ The Singing Down the Barriers Institute predates and helped inspire our Singing Justice collaboration, and its recent activities have both fed and been nourished by the work of the Singing Justice Collective.

Teaching the History of Blackface Minstrelsy

Teaching blackface minstrelsy is important for at least two reasons: (1) because it was so popular for so long, and (2) because it popularized racial stereotypes that remain influential today (see chapter 4). Singing Justice Collective member Stephen Berrey explains the moment he realized that students needed to know this history:

A few years ago on the campus where I was teaching, a controversy emerged over a photo of a student who had darkened their face in what appeared to be a reference to blackface. I was teaching a large lecture course, and I devoted time in class for students to discuss the incident. I started by asking students to share their feelings. Many of them expressed anger and hurt. Some were in tears. Some thought it had been blown out of proportion. Most of them understood that blackface was wrong and that it was racist, but they struggled to articulate precisely why. They knew little or nothing about the long history of minstrel shows and this practice. None of them knew that blackface had remained popular in many communities into the early 1970s. I realized that they were missing the historical context that would help

them understand this incident and more broadly that would help them understand the legacies of earlier racist practices that endure in their present.

Teaching this history helps students understand precisely what is so troubling about blackface, and it also offers a way to understand the relationship between the past and present, as well as the political significance of culture.

As with any hard history, teaching blackface minstrelsy or talking about it in any public setting should be approached with care and planning. We recommend following some key principles before, during, and after presenting this material. To begin, it is important to be aware of your positionality as a teacher. It makes a difference, for example, if the presenter is white, Black, or a representative of another underrepresented group. Whoever the instructor is, some students will be more encouraged to talk, while others will be hesitant. Some may be concerned about the motivations of a white instructor showing racist imagery, which could be interpreted as perpetuating bias. Others may wonder about a Black instructor discussing practices that target Black people. It can be helpful for the instructor to talk about their own position, to explain how they came to this material, and to explain why they included this topic in the class.

Positionality is important for the audience, too. Know who is in the room. For some, seeing these images will be painful or threatening. For some, it will be shameful. For others, it may represent entirely new or less threatening knowledge. Different audience members will have different needs. Some will need knowledge and a language for talking about these issues. Others will need emotional support and recognition of their pain.

Let students know in advance that you will be discussing this difficult topic. It is good practice to give them several reminders on multiple days and in multiple formats (such as in class announcements, email, the syllabus). On the day of the presentation, remind and caution them at the beginning of the class about the material for the day. You can also offer students the option to step out of the room or otherwise disengage with the material. For example, you can let them know that it is okay to look away from the imagery on lecture slides, if they prefer. If you choose to show disturbing imagery, you should also let them know immediately before you are about to show or even discuss something particularly graphic or provocative. For instance, you could say, “I want to warn you that the next slide [or next series of slides] is disturbing. I am showing it because . . .”

Whether you show images of the practice of blackface should depend in part on your awareness of what your audience needs. Showing is more powerful than telling. Facts about this history, images or photos, sheet music covers, etc., will more effectively convey what blackface was and is than simply telling students that blackface was wrong or racist. After a conversation with the class that care-

fully explains the context, showing a photo of someone dressed as a minstrel show character and walking students through the portrayal—such as the bow tie, the outfit, and the makeup—can demonstrate how these representations are dehumanizing. At the same time, if you show a photograph, you do not want to overwhelm your audience with disturbing imagery. Consider one photograph or one group of photographs and go through them expeditiously before returning to slides not likely to trigger or distract students. Grouping them together and signaling that the next series of slides is disturbing will help prepare your audience for those images. An image of blackface should not be left on the screen in the background once your discussion moves on from that image.

To convey the impact of blackface, what it meant during its heyday and its legacy today, it is important to provide historical context (see chapter 4). For example, if discussing the blackface minstrel show that became popular with white, male, working-class audiences in the 1840s and 1850s, situate this cultural form within the context of the fierce, often violent, national debates about slavery that led to the Civil War. Point out to students that even after African Americans achieved emancipation nationally in 1865 and made initial gains for real political and economic power, the minstrel show adjusted and continued, gaining popularity with middle-class audiences. As Black people were experiencing what it meant to be free after slavery, minstrel shows imagined Black people in racist, demeaning roles, often still enslaved and set on an antebellum plantation. In that context, it is no accident that the laws that codified legal segregation and second-class citizenship beginning in the 1880s bore the name of Jim Crow, a blackface minstrel character.

It can be particularly impactful and effective to draw students' attention to the ways that minstrelsy affected the forms of entertainment that they consume (e.g., radio, television, cartoons, films, and advertising) and to make connections or illustrate its reach and pervasiveness in familiar locations and institutions. As we discussed in chapter 4, amateur blackface minstrel shows remained popular well into the twentieth century. A search of digitized newspapers from your area from 1900 to 1970 will almost certainly reveal articles and advertisements for amateur minstrel shows performed in local schools, colleges, churches, and civic and social clubs (such as the American Legion, Kiwanis Club, and Rotary Club). Old yearbooks might also include evidence of these amateur shows. The local connection to this national history often resonates with students.

It is especially crucial to center Black responses to blackface minstrelsy. A common apology for blackface is that the people doing it did not know that it was wrong or even believed it to be an homage to Black culture. Whatever they believed, it is important to show that Black people challenged minstrel portrayals

from the beginning. You could reference, for example, the criticisms of Frederick Douglass or the NAACP campaigns to end blackface. In our seminar recitals, students heard “Minstrel Man,” a Margaret Bonds song from 1959 that set music to Langston Hughes’s 1925 poem by the same title. It is a lament about the harms of minstrelsy for Black people. Lyrics such as “because my mouth is wide with laughter” and “because my feet are gay with dancing” reference minstrel portrayals, in response to which the Black narrator explains, “you do not think I suffer after I have held my pain so long” and “you do not know I die?” The song powerfully shifts the listener’s attention to a Black perspective.⁵ When our students heard this performance, they picked up on complex ideas about race and Jim Crow. One student observed that portraying “Black men in minstrelsy as laughing, singing, and dancing gives the audience an image of happiness when the real reality of Black men and women of the time was plagued with racism and a struggle to get by.”⁶ That student recognized an idea that can often be difficult to explain—that what seems like meaningless or innocent caricature can be incredibly destructive and dehumanizing.

Three Dream Portraits (1959)

“Minstrel Man”

Text by Langston Hughes (1901–1967)

Music by Margaret Bonds (1913–1972)

Chicago-born composer Margaret Bonds wrote in many genres, including classical art songs, spirituals, popular and musical-theater songs, and piano and instrumental music. Her style is defined by drawing from many parts of her heritage and her training as a classical pianist. Her compositional career took off after her song, “The Sea Ghost,” won first prize in the song category of the Wana-maker Competition in 1932, alongside her mentor and former teacher, Florence Price, who won first prize in the symphonic and piano sonata categories.⁷

Bonds maintained a close friendship and collaborative partnership with Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes throughout much of her life. She was initially introduced to Hughes through reading his poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in the Evanston, Illinois, public library. She credited the reaffirming words of the poem with helping her deal with the extreme racism she endured as an undergraduate and graduate student at Northwestern University. After

meeting Hughes, she set “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” to music in 1941 and collaborated with him on many musical-theater productions, art songs, and choral pieces, including the Christmas classic “The Ballad of the Brown King.”

“Minstrel Man” is the first of three Langston Hughes poems that Bonds used to create a song cycle entitled *Three Dream Portraits*. Bonds put these poems together to offer a glimpse into the everyday life of twentieth-century Black Americans. This relatively short song embodies the Black minstrel singer who duplicitously puts on blackface makeup and a smiling face while singing and dancing happy tunes, knowing that the audience does not recognize the fundamental humanity of the singer. As an example of Black Song, “Minstrel Man” demonstrates the brilliant way the Black experience, Black history, empathy, and protest can be encapsulated in a two-minute conversation between the words and music. This song provides a framework for discussion of the implications of blackface minstrelsy and the message of the Harlem Renaissance. It also allows audiences to empathize with a story rarely expressed on the concert stage.

The other two pieces in this set are “Dream Variations” and “I, Too.” The poem in “Dream Variations” depicts Hughes’s longing for an escape from the “white day,” which might indicate an escape from intense scrutiny or a white gaze. “I, Too,” takes a more aggressive approach in which Black Americans are demanding equal treatment as the darker brother of the white American. These three poems are among the most frequently set by African American composers from the generations after Margaret Bonds. For Hughes and Bonds, these three songs were revolutionary expressions of Black pride and humanity and of a refusal to be denied equality during the civil rights movement. For current generations of performers, singing these songs is an act of defiance as they bring real issues from the Black community to the concert stage with boldness and clarity.

Black representations of real lived experience powerfully illustrate how Black people defined themselves in nuanced and humanizing ways that undermined the stereotypes of the minstrel stage. The paintings of Archibald Motley Jr. and Aaron Douglas, the films of Oscar Micheaux, the books of Zora Neale Hurston, the sculptures of Elizabeth Catlett, the songs of Ma Rainey, and the symphonies of Florence Price are just a few examples teachers could draw from to contrast blackface minstrel portrayals with the richness of Black humanity. It is important for any topic that explores the hard history of racism, such as segregation, slavery, and lynching, to include historical Black perspectives.

Music is especially useful in teaching hard history. It often provides an empathetic, emotional entry into a difficult topic. It also encourages listening, shift-

ing attention away from an audience member's preconceptions and toward the perspective of those directly affected. A key to promoting empathy is for individuals to hear another person's perspective. Music does that. As a result, music and other artistic expressions are especially effective in getting an audience to pivot from focusing exclusively on a troubling practice to the ways Black people have responded.

After presenting hard history such as on blackface minstrelsy, create space for students to respond. Consider having them write about what they saw or heard, what in this material elicited an emotional response, or other questions they have. With an awareness of who is present, open the room to discussion. Let people volunteer to respond. It is important not to ask any student to respond as if they were speaking as a representative of a larger group of people. Encourage students to reach out to you after class if they have concerns about this material or want to discuss it further.

Teaching the History of Black Classical Music

Many musicians were taught and probably continue to believe that the standard repertoire of classical music—what is called the canon (see chapter 5)—is complete and accurately represents the music most worth knowing. However, there is a harm in this misconception. The absence of composers of color alongside the European masters has fueled an erroneous myth that Black people have not and cannot excel in this tradition. This is incorrect. This myth has obscured a long history of Black contributions to classical music, including from Mozart's contemporary Joseph Bologne (known popularly as the Chevalier de Saint-Georges) and from composer and violinist George Bridgetower, Beethoven's original dedicatee of his Opus 47 "Kreutzer" sonata (both of whom have gained attention recently). Additionally, this absence perpetuates narratives of exclusivity about who can create and perform this music, discouraging Black talent from participating in this tradition.

Along with the resulting emotional and material consequences for Black musicians, those silences have repercussions for us as teachers, students, and audience members. By recovering the history of music composed by people outside of the mainstream, referred to as "Shadow Culture Narratives," we have the opportunity to reframe the discussion in a way that accurately reflects the capaciousness of classical music.⁸ Furthermore, we can teach the history of Black classical music with a proactive awareness of how some may falsely assume that only white European composers or performers represent this history.

There are many important reasons for rethinking which composers we teach as part of the canon. First, as Bologne and Bridgetower (among many others)

show, classical music was never exclusively white. Second, the sheer range of classical music history means that no group or perspective has privileged knowledge of its traditions. Third, this music has fully spread across the globe; it is international as much as it is European. Thus, no individual or group can claim ownership of classical music as a whole; it belongs to far too many people for that. We thus suggest teaching classical music to emphasize the rich diversity of people who compose, perform, write about, and enjoy classical music.

There are many relatively simple ways to incorporate the diverse peoples who make and have made classical music. Singing Justice member Cody Ebright-Jones, for example, regularly uses Saint-Georges in a classical music survey course to teach students about the late eighteenth-century classic style, about the extent and spread of European empires during this period, and as a way to hear and identify sonata-allegro form, a staple of classical music appreciation courses.

For several years, I was the teaching assistant in a classical music survey designed for first-year college students. Because this class did not require students to be able to read music, I had to find examples of musical forms like ritornello form, rondo form, and sonata form that they could hear and readily identify just by sound. Sonata form was by far the hardest type for students to hear and grasp. They often had trouble understanding it in the context of the Mozart concertos and symphonies from their textbook because these were often ten or more minutes long. It became hard to remember and to identify the important themes as they appeared, and breaking them down in class was often prohibitive, because I only had fifty minutes with the students.

I started using the first movement of Saint-Georges's Symphony in G major (op. 11, no. 1) a few years ago because it is short, its themes are clear and memorable, and it illustrates the relationships between the musical keys and the different sections of sonata form really clearly. This piece also deviates from the textbook sonata form by cutting a transition section in the recapitulation entirely, a little change that students could notice easily. With guided listening and clear listening charts, I could get nearly all my students started on hearing and understanding sonata form well enough to identify the different parts of it and to identify where a composer is playing with or deviating from the textbook form—all in one class.

To hook the students, I would always start with a few paintings of Saint-Georges and a quote from US President John Adams (someone they have heard of) referring to Saint-Georges as "the most accomplished Man in Europe in Riding, Running, Shooting, Fencing, Dancing, Musick."⁹ Then, I would show them a few maps of the French Empire to help ground them geographically. I would show

them all the territories in the Caribbean and North America that the French controlled, and I would zoom in on the island of Guadeloupe, where Saint-Georges was born. We would talk about his parents, a white French aristocrat and an enslaved woman. I would point out for my students how Saint-Georges's formal education was unusual for the descendants of enslaved women and how his future was only possible because of the lucky break afforded by his father. Similarly, we would also talk briefly about Saint-Georges's life in Paris, the highs of success that he reached and the impediments he faced at the Opéra because of racism. The point was to show that Saint-Georges was an eighteenth-century gentleman and to illustrate the circumstances that allowed that to happen.

Adding music and voices of people from the Shadow Culture can enrich your teaching without changing every aspect of the way you teach classical music. Ebright-Jones's lesson on Saint-Georges and sonata form uses standard teaching methods that you might find in any introductory classical music course. However, by using Saint-Georges as the example, it creates an opportunity for students to think holistically about the music of the late eighteenth century and to consider what sort of education, access, and power it took to participate in this music culture. Ebright-Jones's example shows how the standard canon can be broadened without compromise to basic music concepts while also engaging socially and historically salient avenues for student inquiry.

Such strategies rescue neglected music and musicians from the shadows and add them to our lives. Performers seek new music to enrich their programs and distinguish their repertoire. Many scholars want to augment their research and teaching to more accurately represent the past and offer a global perspective more representative of the people sitting in their classrooms. Whatever the motivation, an exciting aspect of this work is that teachers also need to be learners to rediscover Shadow Culture stories. While it may seem daunting to approach teaching this new history of Black Song, seasoned teachers know that knowledge continually evolves and thus that strong pedagogy requires continual learning.

Being a learner means multiple things. It acknowledges that this information has not often been taught. For people who live in the United States, this neglected Shadow Culture is a lost heritage that everyone has a right to know. This rich history helps explain the subtext of racial dialogue that has percolated in the United States since its founding. Black Song engages with the fundamental contradictions of the United States: a wealthy country with extreme poverty, a country divided politically by race and ethnicity, and a nation built on an experiment declaring that everyone "was created equal . . . endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and

the pursuit of Happiness.”¹⁰ Black Song serves to affirm the proposition that Black people are fully human and fully deserving of the aspirations laid out in the Declaration of Independence.

We are in an important period when the story of Black music is being discovered and recovered. This book builds on the work of pioneering (frequently Black) scholars whose works laid a critical foundation for this current generation. These scholars include Eileen Southern, Josephine Wright, Samuel Floyd, Hanson Caldwell, Dominique-René de Lerma, Lucius R. Wyatt, Willis C. Patterson, and others. Nuanced investigations are uncovering previously “forgotten” or lesser-known composers and performance activities that operated in the shadows, invisible to or otherwise unseen by the majority culture. The study of American music has long recognized the contributions of Black artists to vernacular musical traditions (from work songs and hollers to the blues, ragtime, jazz, Motown, funk, and hip-hop) and sacred music (including the many types of spirituals and styles of gospel). Yet to be fully acknowledged are the many symphonies, operas, ballets, oratorios, classical songs, piano sonatas, and chamber works composed and performed by Black musicians. Such music has long sounded in Black spaces, including homes, churches, community centers, schools, and other venues.

Well documented and carefully researched academic articles and book-length studies devoted to Black artists in classical music are beginning to appear. In the past few years, new resources have appeared on the life of Florence Price (1887–1953) in books, recordings, and a documentary film.¹¹ William Grant Still (1895–1978) used to be the only Black composer people might know, based primarily on a few recordings of his *Afro-American Symphony* (1930) and the advocacy of his family publishing company. Yet Still wrote much more, including five symphonies and many more symphonic poems and orchestral suites, eight operas, four ballets, numerous film and television scores, multiple chamber and solo instrumental works, and a lot of vocal music (choral works, solo songs, spirituals, and popular songs). Growing in influence and notoriety is the *Negro Folk Symphony* of William Levi Dawson (1899–1990), which enjoys a new critical edition and increasing numbers of performances and recordings.¹² Online databases and resources, several developed by Singing Justice members (see chapter 8), are also contributing to these new sources of information and are linked to the Black Song website (singingjustice.org) associated with this book.

Today’s musicians, music teachers, and music scholars need to dig into the rich history of Black participation in classical music. Alongside and complementing the nearly all-white narrative of classical music is a rich narrative of Black participation in all styles and genres. We have a more brilliant tapestry of colors, themes, and styles in our American sonic landscape than what is cur-



Fig. 7.1. William Grant Still playing a cello, New York, 1919.

Strand Studio, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/z1709jm5>

rently being taught, performed, and recognized. Recovering these stories from the shadows will not only create a more accurate representation of the musical character of the United States, it will welcome a more vibrant musical culture to the nation's soundscape and inspire generations of new voices to contribute to the beauty and vitality of an essential vein of musical creativity.

Teaching the History of the Black Church

The Black church provides valuable opportunities to teach about music and activism. In music courses, one can shed light on the unique historical circumstances that produced spirituals, hymns, and gospel music. In history courses, Black church music propels the story of US politics and social activism during slavery, Jim Crow, and the post-civil rights movement era. With both topics, the words and emotion of music highlight the human story of Black life in America. This music is a window to explore the joy, pride, faithfulness, perseverance, and daily life of the Black community. The music-making of the Black church shaped much of the popular and protest music of the civil rights era. Studying how

music is made in Black churches and its role in community formation offers a way to explore music's potential as a tool of social change.

Teaching about the Black church invites a more participatory concept of sacred space. Black churches are participatory spaces without spectators. They may not be quiet and contemplative, as is typical of other sacred spaces. Song conjoined with movement is a long-standing tradition within the Black church, and thus the kinship of song and movement in both church worship and street protest is easily recognizable. Members of a congregation in a Black church respond to each other and to worship leaders in a call-and-response format. In teaching about the Black church, a good strategy is to focus on this call-and-response structure, which was used in spirituals, gospel songs, and protest songs from the civil rights era to the present. This helps to connect the eras musically and demonstrates that while musical styles change, the structures, performance practices, and functions of the music do not.

Studying the music of the Black church invites consideration of how songs are reimagined and rewritten to create new meanings. For example, working through the original text of a spiritual such as "Don't Let Nobody Turn You Around" reveals one message and function in worship. Students can then look at the words used for the same melody for civil rights protests when the song became "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" (see chapter 4). Now an anthem of determination, a common thread remains with the emphasis on community unity. You could then ask students to create new words responding to a contemporary controversy or social need.

Musically, the transition from spirituals to the gospel hymn tradition offers important insight into Black Song. Although spirituals and gospel hymns share similarities, gospel hymns were newly composed poems, telling a personal story. They rarely include dialect, although some mishear dialect in more recent gospel stylings.¹³ The gospel hymn "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" by Thomas Dorsey is a good example of a church song also sung in secular space (see the song biography in chapter 4). In the 1960s, gospel singer Mahalia Jackson sang Dorsey's song at demonstrations alongside Martin Luther King Jr. With Jackson's vocal styling and within the context of civil rights protest, the song and lines such as "Lead me on to the light" took on added meaning, becoming a source of courage and inspiration for activists and a moral affirmation of the justice and righteousness of their cause. Thus, Jackson became an important voice for civil rights and played a role in extending gospel music beyond sacred spaces.

Discussing religious experience in a classroom setting can be intimidating and challenging for students and faculty alike. One approach is to enter the topic through community mass choirs, which gained popularity in gospel in the 1970s and essentially redefined the genre. Arising from the church, these

choirs moved into commercial spaces. Artists such as Edwin Hawkins, with his song “O Happy Day,” achieved commercial success on pop and gospel radio. Gospel sounds permeated protest music, too, becoming a defining sound of the civil rights era. Singing Justice member Louise Toppin has used this approach in her teaching:

I created a non-music major course “From Africa to Hip Hop” at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and as a part of the course, I introduced the subject of gospel music to my classes through community mass choirs. These choirs brought together trained and untrained singers to spread the message and sounds of the music and were vital to the popularization of gospel music. My thought process was that if I could help the class experience the music as a community mass choir (as participants), they might have a more engaged relationship with the historical material.

Each year, my class transformed into a mass gospel choir. Students learned about three-part choir divisions (soprano, alto, and men), vocal techniques (belting, vocables, slides, riffs, etc.), and musical characteristics (structure, harmonizations, improvisation, etc.). They also gained experience learning music by rote, interpreting the director’s hand gestures, and getting introduced to gospel stylings, all before we discussed gospel music from a historical perspective. Singing together helped the class (most of whom had never heard gospel music) appreciate the music, because they had embodied gospel music first as practitioners. They learned history, theory, and performance practice from participation rather than solely by observation.

Many students—even those already familiar with the 1960s and 1970s popular music—will benefit from understanding its connections to the Black church.

In teaching about the Black church, you might consider having students complete a playlist assignment, in which they find songs and write about them based on a prompt. A playlist assignment can highlight how some of the musical features from the Black church, such as call-and-response, are spread across the entire world of US music. When creating playlists, students might search for different versions of songs discussed in class or seek connections between music from class and the music they know outside of class. Ask students to find common musical features. What might explain these shared sounds? A playlist project can prompt students to think critically and expansively about sound and meaning in historical context. It is vital to have students explain each selection. Why did they include it, and what does it convey about the theme or course?

In addition to teaching about the Black church, a playlist assignment could be utilized for virtually any topic related to Black history and music. Such an

assignment could be used in any course (musicology, music, history, American studies, etc.), even if music is otherwise minimal or limited. It can be an exam question, or it can be a stand-alone project, akin to an essay. Many of us in the collective have employed some version of this assignment. Singing Justice member Stephen Berrey incorporates a playlist project into a final exam in a history course about the United States in the 1960s. Berrey prompts students to find and select five songs of the era and then write about how they connect to themes in the course.

Singing Down the Barriers Institute

Because the standard canon of classical song has historically excluded contributions by Black composers, this repertoire is generally unfamiliar to singers and voice teachers, regardless of their ethnic background. This lack of knowledge is rooted in the long-standing exclusion, erasure, and devaluing of Black Song, further complicated by the racist legacy of blackface minstrelsy and its mocking and racialized performance practice. However, recital singing opens up possibilities for all performers to engage with Black Song and thus to celebrate and share a powerful vein of human musical creativity. The annual Singing Down the Barriers Institute at the University of Michigan is committed to teaching the technical skill and cultural knowledge required to perform Black Song respectfully in ways that combine cultural knowledge with artistic excellence.

Distinct from opera, in which a singer inhabits a specific character, recital singing asks the singer to tell stories from a wide variety of cultural perspectives. A performer's gender or ethnicity is ostensibly not a factor in determining what repertoire they can sing. Classical song thus offers an excellent entry point for singers interested in Black Song. Concert singers embody the voices of many different characters, sometimes even in a single song. "Der Erlkönig" by Franz Schubert or "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" by Harry T. Burleigh are examples. Yet the racial dynamics of US culture coupled with our limited knowledge of race and history often make white singers reluctant to perform any repertoire that portrays the Black experience or even to perform songs by Black composers that don't explicitly reference race. Black singers are often also reluctant to perform Black Song because they don't want to perpetuate racial stereotypes or simply fulfill limiting, racialized expectations, such as "You're Black, so you should sing spirituals." Added burdens for performers include the fear of provoking negative reactions or accusations of appropriation about who has permission to sing a particular song, or about misperceptions related to minstrel stereotypes. These fears create a vicious circle in which no one wants to invite controversy by performing Black Song, effectively canceling an entire body of

beautiful, socially relevant American song and removing the Black experience from vocal repertoire.

“Ethiopia Saluting the Colors” (1915)

Poem by Walt Whitman (1819–1892), from *Drum Taps* (1871)

Music by Henry Thatcher Burleigh (1866–1949)

Harry T. Burleigh was a pioneering figure in American music, celebrated for his rich baritone voice and exceptional talent in arranging spirituals.¹⁴ His compositions forged the bridge between African American musical traditions and classical music, enabling his spirituals to reach broader audiences and influence contemporaries such as Antonín Dvořák. Burleigh’s contributions to the song repertoire include almost 100 solo art songs, including some that integrate African American culture within the conventions of classical art song traditions, exemplified by his work “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” which set Walt Whitman’s poem to music.

Whitman imbued his poetry with a musical quality that permeated his entire oeuvre. He was recognized as the “Bard of Democracy,” and music functioned as a central metaphor in both his personal life and literary works, serving as a meta-physical framework as well as a concrete reality. For America’s Bard of Democracy, the voice—whether spoken or sung—symbolized the soul of the nation. He believed that America required “a race of singers and poems different from all others.”¹⁵ He proclaimed that “the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,” one that awaits the grand and generous treatment it deserves.¹⁶

Walt Whitman’s poem “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors” was composed during the US Civil War, explicitly reflecting on General William Tecumseh Sherman’s 1864–65 march from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia, and then through South and North Carolina. Sherman’s marches were “scorched earth” campaigns intended to undermine the Confederate war effort and to destroy public morale in the rebelling states.¹⁷ The poem depicts a poignant encounter between a mature African American woman, personified as “Ethiopia,” and the Union troops as she salutes the American flag.¹⁸ This act symbolizes the complex interplay of loyalty, hope, and the quest for freedom among African Americans during the war.

Whitman’s poem resonates with themes of liberation and patriotism. The figure of Ethiopia, serving as an allegorical representation of African Americans, saluting the Union colors suggests an acknowledgment of the Union’s role in the emancipation of enslaved individuals. This salute represents a powerful

gesture of respect and recognition of the Union's efforts toward abolition, albeit amid the confusion and weariness of the marching army.

In setting Whitman's poem to music, Burleigh infuses it with a sense of solemn dignity and profound emotional resonance. Burleigh's melodic choices in "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" reflect his deep understanding of both spirituals and classical music, incorporating allusions to familiar melodies such as "Marching Through Georgia" and "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Rhythmically, Burleigh's composition balances the stately, march-like qualities suited to the poem's military context with the more fluid and expressive rhythms characteristic of spirituals.

Significantly, if the context of the war helps us understand Whitman's poem, it is Jim Crow that provides context for Burleigh's decision to put this poem to music. By 1915, segregation and racial violence had defined national race relations for a generation. While during the war Union troops and the federal government had become an imperfect symbol and supporter of Black freedom, now the federal government supported segregation and limits on Black freedom. As evidenced by the popularity of the blockbuster film *The Birth of a Nation*, which came out in that year, many white Americans endorsed the idea that Black freedom had been a mistake. In this context, Burleigh spotlighted a poem that situates Black people and their quest for freedom at the center of the nation's past.¹⁹

Singing Down the Barriers began as a way to address this impasse by targeting barriers of understanding that discourage wider performance of Black classical song and arrangements of spirituals for solo concert performance. The institute includes lectures about the history of Black Song that explain how the twin legacies of chattel slavery and blackface minstrelsy have devalued Black classical music on one hand and commodified stereotypes about Black music on the other. We facilitate open dialogue among participants to address sensitive and emotional topics as we build a learning community that promotes mutual appreciation and respect for the music. Students also explore the entire gamut of African American classical song through presentations and performance. They learn about different bodies of repertoire within Black Song and its specialized performance practice. They observe and work with master teachers in master classes, and take private lessons to refine vocal skills, diction, and style. Students participate in reading circles to increase their awareness of Black history and culture. The institute culminates with students performing Black Song together in concert, giving voice to Black experience in a mutually supportive environment.²⁰

Singers of all ethnicities and walks of life (college professors, students, church musicians, and arts administrators) have expressed how learning about and performing Black Song is transformative. The interracial dialogue and understanding it inspires is deepened immeasurably by the emotional power of music and poetry, and it is truly a joy to center and celebrate Black Song in a diverse community of musicians. Ultimately, as Black Song becomes a regular part of concert repertoire, audiences benefit, too, deepening their understanding of the Black experience, music, and history.

8: The Singing Justice Model of Black Song Research

Key Takeaways

- The model of the Singing Justice Collective offers useful innovations for studying Black Song, beginning with the diversity of our team and the processes we used to build trust and learn together.
- Collaborative writing is scary as well as gratifying, opening all members of the group to equal ownership of a manuscript. This approach was indispensable to our achievement of writing this book.
- The importance of musical performance and community to Black Song shaped our model for conducting and disseminating our research.
- New databases and websites provide accessible resources for finding Black musical repertoire, bringing the music of African American and African diaspora composers to the forefront with essential cultural context.

Collaborative Writing through the Philosophy of Black Song: A Book Sprint Retreat

Writing is often a solitary enterprise, from the initial planning stages to researching, thinking, drafting, and revising a manuscript. For this book, we envisioned a process inspired by the philosophy of our subject: Black Song. All eleven team members would write as a community, writing as much as possible in a singular collective voice. Typical multiauthor works in the humanities are written as collections, in which individuals write signed essays or chapters that are then stitched together. The sciences, in contrast, have a collaborative lab model in which multiple people involved in research publish books and articles together, but this model is circumscribed by a strict hierarchy. We sought something different. Brought together by the University of Michigan's experimental Humanities Collaboratory, our group of eleven scholars and performers had no experi-

ence in collaborative writing of this kind. It was a daunting task. Although we spent two years together developing our seminar recitals, learning to share ideas and communicate honestly, we were still a collection of individuals—faculty members, students, and performance professionals—representing multiple disciplines, each with our own unique experiences and perspectives. We learned to work together, but collaborative writing represented a unique challenge, an experiment that often seemed more aspirational than possible. We turned to a book sprint, a five-day writing retreat, to meet this challenge.

Our writing process began long before the retreat, in our earliest meetings together. We taught one another and learned about our individual strengths and areas of expertise in the team. We met throughout the academic year and then engaged in more intense work during the first two summers. Early on we focused on learning and coming together as a team. We devised reading and research assignments for the group and invited outside scholars, performers, curators, and others to join our meetings and fill in gaps in our knowledge. We learned from each other as we developed a trust, respect, and real affection for one another that would be critical to our work. The initial anti-racist training we did together proved essential for fostering the kind of openness and trust that would be needed to write together.

As the goal of writing a book coalesced, we sought a pathway to completing it. We borrowed a model—the book sprint—used by another Humanities Collaboratory team, in which multiple authors committed to a sequestered, intensive retreat to go from blank page to book in one week. Those of us who had published books before had doubts, but we moved forward with the process. We selected BookSprints, Ltd. (<https://www.booksprints.net/>), a company based in Berlin, Germany, to support our work, and CEO Barbara Rühling served as our facilitator. In the months leading up to the retreat, we met several times with Rühling to identify book objectives, themes, and our intended audience. We formulated a working outline and devoted attention to interpreting the data we had collected during our seminar recitals. This pre-sprint process involved group brainstorming and some drafting of possible material for the book.

For the writing retreat itself, we spent a week at the Stage Neck Inn in York Harbor, Maine, along the Atlantic coast. We knew that the work would be focused, intense, creative, and collaborative, and this location met our needs for a place that would truly feel like a retreat, distancing us from our daily responsibilities and routines. Our work sessions began promptly at 9:00 a.m. each day. We paused for lunch together and we stopped around 6:00 p.m. for dinner. Afterward, some in the group returned to work, writing until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. Rühling played a pivotal role in keeping us on task, assessing what we had accomplished, and moving us forward.

Our first day began with a group discussion to revisit and ultimately revise our book goals and proposed chapter outlines. Organization was key to our productivity and progress. A flip chart and an online spreadsheet listed the various parts of the book to be drafted, with columns identifying tasks for each part. Columns included “1st draft,” “1st review,” “2nd review,” etc., through to a fourth and final review. One pair or trio took the lead in creating a draft of each chapter or section. A second pair or trio then reviewed the draft, added material, and made revisions. Through that system, everyone worked on virtually every part of the book. An essential part of our process was that each team of writers took full ownership of the text, being empowered to add, edit, revise, delete, and restructure at will. Rather than adding a comment or question for review by previous writers, updates were made as each writing team saw fit. Material cut from the chapter was pasted into a “Parking Lot” at the end of the document. That allowed us to keep track of cuts and material that might be added later. This process of reading, writing, revising, and adding more information and citations helped to strengthen the work and to bring in the unique knowledge and expertise of each member. Our collective authorial voice quickly asserted itself, such that the style of the individuals who had first drafted a text soon faded. It helped to have many indoor and outdoor places for writing and meeting to allow subgroups to convene and share ideas. Rühling tracked who was working on each section, encouraged teams to wrap up and pass their work along, and brought us together for conversations when needed. At the end of our day our writing went to copyeditors on Rühling’s team in South Africa. They read and commented on our manuscript while we slept and, each morning, we began our work by discussing suggested changes and editorial queries.

Five days of collaborative writing, conversation, decision-making, and editing later, we had written approximately 57,000 words. The work was intense, exhilarating, gratifying, and exhausting. By the end we had drafts of a preface, seven chapters, five case studies, and ten song biographies. To be sure, it was a rough draft. In the two months following the retreat, group members continued to add material and fill in footnotes, and several members continued to revise the entire manuscript. Beyond strengthening the content, we sought a single, collective authorial voice. By the end of the summer 2023, we had a 77,000-word draft submitted to the University of Michigan Press for review.

After receiving our reader reports and creating plans for revision, we held a three-day retreat in May 2024 on the University of Michigan campus to revise and update the manuscript. We followed a similar collective sprint model. Smaller teams made revisions to address issues raised by the press, and then subsequent teams revised and added to these changes. We did not use a professional facilitator but, given our previous experience, we were able to work effi-



Fig. 8.1. (l-r) Mark Clague, Cody Ebright-Jones, Samantha Rose Williams, Stephen Berrey, Naomi André, Louise Toppin, Tyrese Byrd, Caroline Helton, Traci Lombré, Christie Finn, and Barbara Rühling during the book sprint at Stage Neck Inn in York Harbor, Maine, June 2023. *Photo by Mark Clague.*

ciently for eight hours each day. Indeed, we now approached collaborative writing with a great deal of confidence.

The revised manuscript went out to additional readers. In summer 2025, we held a final stage of collaborative writing, with some of us in person and some joining on Zoom. At that time members were based across the United States and Europe (Germany, Hungary, and Poland). A few of us were able to meet in person in Ann Arbor, but most of the work at this stage was done online through shared Google Docs, emails, and phone. Drawing on the second round of reader reports, we divided into teams to focus on various parts of the manuscript. Several read through the manuscript in its entirety, making final edits and revisions. A subgroup worked on a companion website (singingjustice.org). Over two months, some members read through the full manuscript to tighten the narrative, regularize formatting, and provide layout suggestions. Others focused on obtaining necessary copyright permissions for publication.

It remains no small surprise to us all that we have a book. It is a testament to our commitment to the project and to one another. We see the primary outcome of this work as our coming together as a team, with the book as a record of our camaraderie. The process has changed us all, personally and professionally. On some level, we have become an extended musical family. We also gained valuable individual collaborative skills in researching, thinking, writing, and revising as a unit. We highly recommend this approach. Our experience has changed

how we conceive of doing work generally, and we have each come to appreciate the power of community and the inspiration of Black Song in our own lives.

Conducting and Disseminating Research Through Performance

Throughout our research and writing process, our work was shaped by our embrace of the role of performance and community in Black Song. We conducted research in performance contexts, allowing us to witness and draw on Black Song's ability to inspire community. While this book and its associated website are a primary outcome, we also used public performance as a conduit to share our research findings with concertgoers and other musicians.

Song of America: A Celebration of Black Music

An early result of our Singing Justice Collaboration was the three-program mini-festival, *Song of America: A Celebration of Black Music*, in May and June 2021 at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, Germany. Three members of Singing Justice (Christie Finn, Thomas Hampson, and Louise Toppin) programmed and planned the festival. Hampson and Toppin performed alongside tenor Lawrence Brownlee, soprano Leah Hawkins, mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska, and baritone Justin Austin. The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Orchestra, conducted by Roderick Cox, was the accompanying orchestral ensemble for the third concert.

Building on his popular *Song of America* radio series, Hampson initiated the idea in collaboration with the general and artistic director of the Elbphilharmonie, Christoph Lieben-Seutter. During the summer of 2020, while the world was locked down from COVID-19, Hampson suggested bringing Black American music to the Elbphilharmonie in a focused festival format, and Lieben-Seutter agreed.¹

The festival's three programs:

- "Langston Hughes: Singing Harlem in Europe," featuring piano/vocal settings of Langston Hughes poems set to music by European and Black American composers.
- "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," featuring piano/vocal settings of poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, and other Harlem Renaissance poets; the words of Martin Luther King Jr., Claude McKay, and other poets of the African Diaspora; as well as newly imagined spirituals, set to music by Black American composers.

- “Hope in the Night,” performed by the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Orchestra and conducted by Roderick Cox, featuring the music of George Walker (*Lyric for Strings*), Hale Smith and Margaret Bonds spirituals for voice, the operatic repertoire of William Grant Still, and William Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony*.

These concerts were the first at the Elbphilharmonie after a seven-month hiatus precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was quite remarkable that the music of Black American composers reopened the Elbphilharmonie with not one but three concerts.

Because of the pandemic, the reach of these concerts expanded. Our performances were recorded and available for video playback internationally, creating unexpected ripple effects. For instance, in fall 2021, Duke University composition professor Stephen Jaffe and English professor Tsitsi Jaji created a seminar entitled “Double Consciousness: Perspectives on Composition in Black Music and Poetry.” They cited this festival as the catalyst for a graduate seminar that is still taught. Since 2021, Toppin has been a visiting resident artist for the Duke seminar, and her first visit contributed research to our study. As of 2025, the works of African American and African Diaspora composers continue to occupy a small but important niche in the classical music scene of Central Europe.

George Shirley Vocal Competition

The George Shirley Vocal Competition (GSVC, <https://smt.d.umich.edu/george-shirley-competition/>) is a music education and performance event that encourages students, young professionals, and their teachers to explore the songs of African American and African Diaspora classical composers. A goal of the competition is to encourage classical voice students and early-stage, classically trained professionals of all ethnicities to learn the Black Song repertoire. Students (as well as their voice teachers) may not appreciate the artistry and cultural understanding that can be developed by studying and performing classical song generally and Black Song specifically. The competition inspires vocalists to learn and perform this repertoire with potential cash prizes, but competitors also have the opportunity to learn the history and performance practices of Black Song in master classes and concerts. Most important, the competition illuminates and uplifts the repertoire of African American and African diaspora composers. Appreciating the success of the competition begins with an understanding of its namesake, George Shirley.

George Shirley is acknowledged as the first Black tenor and only the sec-



Fig. 8.2. George Shirley.
Olan Mills.

ond African American man to sing leading roles with New York's Metropolitan Opera, becoming the opera's first Black star. He performed 28 roles in 26 operas over the course of 11 seasons at the Met. Born in Indianapolis in 1934 and raised in Detroit, Shirley was the first African American appointed to a high school teaching position in music in Detroit and later became the first Black member of the United States Army Chorus in Washington, DC. In 1961 he won the competition of the National Council of the Metropolitan Opera, securing a scholarship and a contract.² He won a 1967 Grammy Award for the opera *Così fan tutte*, performing alongside Leontyne Price.³ That same year he made his Met debut as Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Shirley's legacy of performance and teaching (professor at Montclair State University, the University of Maryland, and for the majority of his career, the University of Michigan), as well as his philanthropic endeavors, have enriched the lives of students and audiences worldwide. In 2015, he was awarded the National Medal for the Arts, presented by President Barack Obama. In addition to his work as a singer and philanthropist, he has been an advocate for African American music and culture. His experience judging a vocal competition for Italian repertoire inspired him to consider a competition focused on African American song.

This competition has been in existence only 15 years but has seen significant growth in the prize money, the number and quality of the contestants, and the prestigious profiles of the judges and masterclass clinicians. The vocal competition began in 2011 at the behest of Shirley and was cofounded with Louise Toppin as a competition for Detroit high school students. Partnering with the Detroit Spiritual Festival directed by Nina Scott, the competition gave \$1,000 in prizes its first year. The competition soon launched a college division, partnering with Wayne State University in Detroit, and then Detroit Opera (formerly known as Michigan Opera), to host the competition. In need of more space by 2016, the GSVC moved to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The competition then initiated a composers division to encourage new compositions by African American composers (sponsored by Marquita Lister). By 2019, the GSVC began a pre-professional division for artists up to the age of 32. The pandemic in 2020 forced the GSVC to hold the composers competition virtually and to cancel the vocal portion. Even though they were still online in 2021, the GSVC held a virtual competition to celebrate ten years of competitions. The competition has continued to grow and recently added the international division for students studying in universities outside of the United States. Throughout the years they have added many special prizes from renowned artists such as Robert Sims, Karen Slack, and Kenneth Overton to support and encourage the work of their competitors. The GSVC provides not only space to perform Black Song (art song, arias, and spirituals), but learning opportunities through concerts, master classes, and classes that are free to the competitors and guests. As of 2024, the competition began a partnership with the University of Michigan to permanently house and endow the competition, and by 2025 the prizes totaled \$48,000. As the prizes to support students steadily increase, the competition, through its existence, is extending the legacy of African American art song in the singing world.

In May of 2022, Singing Justice collaborated with the GSVC at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to share our research with participants and gather research data. We presented a seminar recital and conducted focus groups with students, teachers, and parents of all ethnicities who attended the GSVC events. Team members Caroline Helton and Samantha Williams introduced the Singing Justice initiative at the opening-night concert. They invited participants to register for focus group sessions scheduled throughout the weekend to discuss their experiences with Black Song. Additionally, Helton hosted a seminar recital with performances by members of Louise Toppin's African American art song class. It proved to be an excellent discussion opportunity to engage with singers of varying motivations and experience levels with Black Song. Students, faculty, and parents responded positively to the recital and stayed after to ask questions

and sign up for the sessions. Subsequent focus groups included a wide-ranging group of singers and teachers.

Because these participants were already engaged with Black Song, our focus group conversation dove into personal experiences and concerns about performing music deeply embedded in the Black experience, especially for those who did not identify as Black. The focus group format allowed participants to respond at length to questions with no easy answers and provided nuanced data for our study. We explored the need for deep contextual understanding of the repertoire and considered how “permission” to perform this repertoire could be granted. The collaboration proved to be a successful venture for both parties. The Singing Justice team had an opportunity to engage students, teachers, and parents in a supportive environment that allowed participants to share freely. Competition organizers could tap into additional learning opportunities and invite competitors to more deeply explore their relationship to Black Song.

Singing Justice Conference

To extend our research outside both the academy and the country, Singing Justice collaborated with the Internationale Hugo-Wolf-Akademie (IHWa) of Stuttgart, Germany, in presenting the conference *Singing Justice: Decentering Whiteness in Vocal Music* from November 4 to 6, 2022. The opportunity arose from the relationship between the Hampsong Foundation and the IHWa, whose director, Cornelia Weidner, expressed an interest in programming more music by marginalized composers and exploring methods to introduce this music to audiences. The conference was hosted at a music conservatory, the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart in Stuttgart. Most Singing Justice members participated, along with Cornelia Bartsch (Technische Universität Dortmund), Germany-based American tenor Ray M. Wade Jr., and two faculty members from the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, musicology professor Natasha Loges and music theory professor Phillipp Teriete.

The *Singing Justice* conference gave team members a unique opportunity to explore the ramifications of our research from non-American and nonacademic perspectives. There were keynote addresses by Bartsch (“The Undiscovered Land . . . Figures of Colonialism in European Music Aesthetic”) and Naomi André (“Singing Justice and Blackness in Music History”); master classes on singing Black Song; concerts that included classical and experimental music; and group discussions on related topics, including “What Is Black Song?”, “‘The Adorno Dilemma’: Fumi Okiji’s book *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited*,” “Barriers to Inclusion,” and “Music & Activism (Black Lives Matter).”⁴

Our discussions focused especially on Black Song in Germany, where “decen-



Fig. 8.3. Tyrese Byrd demonstrating the gospel music style at the Singing Justice conference in Stuttgart, Germany, November 2022.

Photo by Mark Clague.

tering whiteness” in music in Germany is not a particularly welcome endeavor. Germany views itself as the progenitor and center of the classical song tradition, given the weight placed on many song composers born on German soil (Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Johannes Brahms, to name a few). Institutions such as IHWA, which rely on audience attendance as a primary source of funding, often find that ultra-conservative concert programming, such as Franz Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* song cycle of 1823, draws the most reliable audience attendance. The more programming deviates from the canonical masterworks of *lieder* repertoire, the sparser the audience. Yet audiences are changing. Relying only on repertoire that has worked in the past is a flawed strategy. Our hope had been that the effort to attract younger and wider audiences might benefit from a new approach, such as the embrace of forgotten, contemporary, or neglected voices. Interestingly, the *Singing Justice* conference was sparsely attended both by students of the Stuttgart music school and members of the typical IHWA audience, yet it received generous funding from the Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst (Department of Science, Research and Art) of the German state of Baden-Württemberg. The institutional interest is there, but audiences are somehow not yet engaged with this reper-

toire. We are grateful that allies such as Cornelia Weidner of IHWA welcomed us. They are essential to forging networks of scholars and performers willing to take risks to disrupt the narrative of maleness and whiteness in concert life.

Tyrese Byrd also gave a short seminar recital distinguishing gospel music from spirituals, two Black sacred genres often conflated in Europe. Starting with an a cappella spiritual, “A City Called Heaven,” he demonstrated how the song may have sounded during the period of enslavement. Next, he gave examples of concert spirituals meant to model the European art song tradition. He then performed an example of early gospel music, which differs from spirituals. Based on contemporary poetry, gospel usually has a more clearly defined structure, and it is usually drawing from blues traditions. Byrd’s experience as a Black church music leader and keyboardist allowed him to demonstrate the style, both singing and playing piano. He explained that spirituals and gospel traditions also overlap. There are some gray areas where gospel music uses spirituals as source material, as in the Caravans’ most popular song, “Mary Don’t You Weep.” Making the issue more complicated, later concert spirituals borrowed popular gospel styling, as in Jacqueline Hairston’s treatment of “Don’t Feel No-Ways Tired.” The audience reacted positively to learning the nuances of these Black styles, stressing the importance of telling the creators’ stories in teaching about Black Song.

Academic Conference Presentations

In 2023, Singing Justice presented research at two academic conferences, gathering feedback about our research methods and demonstrating for fellow academics how live musical performance facilitates teaching hard history. We presented “An Experiment in Anti-Racist Music Performance, Research, and Engagement Centering ‘Black Song’” to the Society for American Music national conference in Minneapolis on March 8, 2023. Typically, such a conference presentation would involve a research talk illustrated by recorded music. We thought, however, that demonstrating our seminar recital method by adding live performance would be most effective, pulling audience members into the full pedagogical experience. After opening with a description of our model, we presented two concert spirituals: Undine Smith Moore’s “Watch and Pray,” sung by Tyrese Byrd, and Hall Johnson’s “City Called Heaven,” sung by Caroline Helton. Allowing attendees to experience these performances firsthand positioned them to gauge the effectiveness of our research survey methodology. We asked questions such as “Does the race of the performer influence the way you hear the music?” and “How can this music be used to teach hard history?”

Our presentation showcased the ways we have presented Black Song in

classrooms at the University of Michigan. We focused not only on live performance, but on the parallel classroom discussions and student responses, featuring “Hound Dog” and “Strange Fruit” (see chapter 6). Next, we performed two settings of James Weldon Johnson’s poem, “Sence You Went Away.” Tyrese Byrd began with a setting composed by the poet’s brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, followed by Lori Hicks’s 2002 setting sung by Louise Toppin. The pairing not only demonstrated the enduring inspiration of Black poetry, it allowed comparison regarding how a composition can reflect the composer’s gender and historical context.

Live music is not generally featured in academic presentations, so our singing had a galvanizing effect, drawing attendees in from the hallway and generating a lively Q&A conversation. Audience feedback was very positive, emphasizing the power and effectiveness of live performance to teach about American music and history. There was one white attendee, however, who took exception to a white performer singing a spiritual, because it was not a part of that singer’s ancestral experience. This audience member’s perspective was not altered by interactions with our group. In another conversation after the session, a Black attendee praised both Helton and Byrd for their sincerity of expression and spoke of being very moved by their performances. Possibly the most useful feedback we received was the observation that our project had explored predominantly white and mixed spaces, but not many predominantly Black spaces. That prompted our team to seek performance opportunities in Black spaces. Subsequently we visited North Carolina Central University, the Alfred Street Baptist Church, and the Carr Center in Detroit. It also gave us the idea to present at a second scholarly conference later in the year.

Our team traveled to Jacksonville, Florida, to present a similar seminar-recital session for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) national conference in September 2023. Carter G. Woodson, who initiated Negro History Week (which became Black History Month in 1976), founded ASALH in 1915. ASALH is comprised of predominantly African American scholars that includes historians, social scientists, anthropologists, political scientists, secondary-school educators, and students, as well as activists and members of the local community interested in Black history and culture. Although it regularly includes sessions on Black music, ASALH has a broad multidisciplinary range.

The theme for the 2023 annual conference was “Black Resistance,” which was particularly appropriate due to its meeting location. Florida had recently passed legislation seeking to regulate how and even whether Black history is taught in the state. Even though the decision to hold the conference in Florida



Fig. 8.4. Singing Justice team members at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference in Jacksonville, Florida, September 2023.

Photo by Marshall Butler.

was controversial, the fact that Jacksonville was home to James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson and has one of the state's largest concentrations of African American residents gave the location special meaning and power. Louise Toppin summed up our presentation by saying, "You can ban a book, but you can't ban a song!"

Most of our Singing Justice team attended this conference. There was no piano available, so Helton and Toppin sang two spirituals a cappella, "City Called Heaven" and "Lord How Come Me Here?" respectively. Byrd and Toppin sang an a cappella duet arrangement of the spiritual "Scandalize My Name." All other music was presented using video recordings from our seminar recitals. Audience members provided feedback on the research and performances. The primarily African American audience was generally knowledgeable about music, in some cases through formal study but mostly through personal musical experiences such as in church, and through primary-school education. They expressed strong support for our work to preserve, teach, and perform Black Song in a myriad of spaces. This audience was open to hearing all people perform Black music and brought a depth of experience to their understanding of the music and the importance of sharing it.

Internet Resources

The Singing Justice Collective highly recommends the following internet databases as comprehensive and current resources for continued research into Black Song. These databases enrich the information detailed in this book and provide users with a wealth of additional information, audio and video recordings, and updated research. In the case of the *African Diaspora Music Project*, *Song of America*, and *Black Opera Research Network*, these databases were created to bring the music of African American and African diaspora composers to the forefront for both scholars and performers. These are multifaceted, interactive research tools that seek to provide comprehensive information and counter the legacy of neglect for music in the African American Shadow Culture. We have also created a companion website to this book (singingjustice.org). The Singing Justice website is designed for scholars, musicians, and the public to celebrate the power of Black Song and to allow users to discover their own pathways for learning about and listening to a beautiful and potent vein of human creativity and expression.

African Diaspora Music Project

The *African Diaspora Music Project* (ADMP, africandiasporamusicproject.org) began as an Excel spreadsheet of the musical scores in Louise Toppin's personal archive. She had researched and collected vocal, keyboard, and instrumental scores by Black composers since her days as a student. She began the project with data entry assistance from graduate students at East Carolina University and undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. From 1990 to 2017 the spreadsheet grew to chronicle more than 4,000 scores.

The 2017 expansion of the George Shirley Vocal Competition (detailed earlier in this chapter) sparked the creation of the African Diaspora Music website from those spreadsheets. Student competitors were singing repertoire from only a few sources, most notably the anthology *Art Songs by Black Composers* compiled and edited by Willis Patterson of the University of Michigan. The competition organizers noticed that students presented just a handful of other repertoire that had been found in archives, out-of-print scores, or other sources. More resources and resource information was needed.

Working with the team of RyOne, Inc., and Designenrg (web and graphic designers), the ADMP team created a website that assumed no knowledge of the subject matter but was rich with easily accessible resources. The website's many search functions necessitated a custom-built search engine. The development



Fig. 8.5. Logo of the African Diaspora Music Project.

team researched biographies; received repertoire lists, biographies, and photographs from composers; identified poets; determined lengths of pieces, voice type, and publisher information; and anticipated the parameters that would be helpful for a user interested in discovering, locating, studying, and performing this repertoire.

The ADMP team released the first phase of the website in 2019 and presented only vocal repertoire. With the murder of George Floyd, ADMP responded to increasing and urgent requests for orchestral repertoire by creating fields specific to the orchestral music. They released phase two in the summer of 2020, accompanied by presentations at the League of American Orchestras national conference and other meetings. The ADMP team also began presenting residencies with orchestras, concert series, and universities to consider how to respectfully include this repertoire in their programming and teaching. In 2022, the ADMP team added instrumental and keyboard repertoires to the database.

Orchestral administrators suggested that they needed curated lists of compelling repertoire and organizers added this material, along with professional videos provided by ensembles such as the Minnesota Orchestra. To create these lists, ten conductors and thought leaders provided their own lists of ten works that they loved from the African American repertoire. Users have responded positively to the added guidance from experienced figures in the field. Accompanying video recordings allow users to make informed choices. The website's goal is to share free information to support engagement with music by Black composers. It is also a growing archive and research tool that accepts information from the public. Composers, performers, and others can submit repertoire to be considered for inclusion in the database. The database continues to grow and is continually refined to make it as comprehensive, useful, and accessible as possible for all visitors.

Song of America Database

The Hampsong Foundation launched the *Song of America* database (<https://songofamerica.net>) in its current form in 2009, a year identified as marking 250 years of American “classic song.” “Classic song” is a term coined by Thomas



Fig. 8.6. Logo of the Song of America.

Hampson to refer to “poetry set to music” (as opposed to songs with lyrics, like those typically associated with musical theater and popular forms of music). This semiquincentennial marked the creation of the song “My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free” (1759) by Declaration of Independence signer and poet-composer Francis Hopkinson. “My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free” was, at least in 2009, regarded as the earliest surviving American secular vocal composition, and one that Hampson encountered in the archives of the Library of Congress and subsequently recorded.

Songofamerica.net offers myriad entries on American classic songs and the composers and poets who created them. The database includes over 650 profiles of individuals and almost 3,000 entries of songs and song cycles. Also included on the website is the thirteen-program *Song of America* radio series, produced by Hampson with the WFMT Radio Network of Chicago, as well as other resources, including recordings, K–12 lesson plans, essays on historical topics, and a comprehensive timeline. The goal remains to curate a comprehensive archive of American songs that tells the story of the United States through the eyes of American poets and the ears of American composers.

Much of the initial content of songofamerica.net came from *Song of America* web and performance projects created by Hampson and the Library of Congress in 2005–06. Hampson developed essays with musicologists on specific songs and toured recital programs around the country during those years, typically exhibiting sheet music and other artifacts in the lobby at his performances. Ear-

lier iterations of Hampson's work on American classic song find their way to *Song of America* in program and liner notes dating as far back as the mid-1980s. Finally, web materials developed to support the 1997 PBS Great Performances telecast "Thomas Hampson: I Hear America Singing" and the 2001 Salzburg Festival "I Hear America Singing" programs are included.

An accompanying objective of songofamerica.net is to feature songs and biographies of marginalized composers to enrich our understanding of American music. The website has a special focus on Black composers and poets/writers, as well as women and other creators of color. Songofamerica.net remains a work in progress. Since 2009, Hampsong Foundation managing director and Singing Justice member Christie Finn has developed a majority of the content. From 2021 until 2024, a partnership between the Hampsong Foundation and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance facilitated a student research *Song of America* Fellowship. Via this program, advanced students in both musicology and performance were employed to work with Finn to create and publish new research.

Black Opera Research Network

The *Black Opera Research Network* (BORN) is an online resource created in 2021 by a group of scholars (including Singing Justice member Naomi André) based in the United States, South Africa, and Europe. The network explores opera inside and outside the traditional structure of the West (such as opera houses and concert halls). While BORN centers on Blackness and opera, the network recognizes that questions of racial identity are complex, and they vary by individual experience and cultural contexts. Rather than fixing definitions for or interpretations of "Blackness," BORN contributes to the expanding discourse on alternative operatic cultures, using Blackness as a portal into thinking about other nonwhite identities and representations in opera. Scholars and practitioners maintain the network and invite conversation with those in Black opera as a lived reality and scholarly endeavor.

The website blackoperaresearch.net focuses on three general areas: (1) the relationship between opera and race; (2) opera activities, both historical and current, that challenge the perceived whiteness of opera as a genre; and (3) operatic cultures that extend the boundaries of traditional or canonic, Western opera. The network advocates for an inclusive, socially responsive, and responsible critical scholarship. Through annual webinars and panel sponsorships at conferences and symposia, BORN facilitates dialogue between scholars and practitioners. The website is a place for developing and curating resources



Fig. 8.7. Logo of the *Black Opera Research Network*.

for performance, teaching, and research concerning Black opera around the world. Curated resources on the BORN website include databases that feature published literature, unpublished dissertations, online resources, audiovisual resources, and operatic works. Beginning in 2025, BORN is helping to launch the *Journal of Black Opera & Music Theatre*. BORN is currently working to help establish a series of critical editions of operas composed by Black and interracial compositional teams across the globe, with special emphasis on artists in the United States, Europe, and Africa.

Black Opera Database

A growing list of Black operas is being maintained by Allison Lewis and Nicholas Newton. At the time of writing, the list includes some 350 pages, and there is a mechanism for adding newly composed works. The document covers six categories: (1) operas by Black composers, (2) operas by non-Black composers that tackle issues of race concerning the Black experience, (3) operas by non-Black composers that have one or more Black characters, (4) oratorios and concert works that involve the voice, written by Black composers, (5) concert works by non-Black composers that engage issues of race concerning the Black experience, and (6) musicals by Black composers who have also written operas. An additional category, “operas by Black librettists,” is in development. The Black Opera Database is currently housed on the BORN website. Should you wish to circulate, promote, or add to the list, please contact Allison Lewis and Nicholas Newton (available for noncommercial purposes only) at blackoperadatabase@gmail.com

The Singing Justice Website

From our earliest conversations about publishing our research, our Singing Justice Collective imagined a “magic book” that combined text and music and invited reader engagement. We hoped to present our research findings in an interactive, collaborative way, that (1) enchants (like a proper “magical object” should) as it opens doors of discovery and curiosity about Black Song, and (2) informs through words, visuals, interactive components, and most importantly, music. We explored many ideas before landing on the current presentation of our research: a peer-reviewed book, which is available to download in full for free at <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14479173> and is positioned to address the needs of the academic and educational community.

In searching for the right partner for the website, we repeatedly returned to Carnegie Hall’s *Timeline of African American Music* (<https://timeline.carnegie-hall.org/>). This website inspired us throughout our research. The creative presentation of excellent research aligned with our goals: rich and accurate content, a highly interactive interface, aesthetically stunning visuals and audios, easily accessible ideas, and compelling storytelling through music. We reached out to Synoptic Office, the design agency responsible for the *Timeline of African American Music*, and immediately heard back from the agency’s founders, YuJune Park and Caspar Lam. Their excitement about our project, willingness to support our vision, and patience with our complex working process have been consistent since our first email interaction in April 2023.

In our monthly meetings with Synoptic Office, we stressed the importance of fun in the user experience. A visitor should enjoy listening to the music, watching the videos, and reading about each song and artist. The website should be educational without *feeling* educational. Excerpts from the book—as well as parts of the book that did not fit into the print version—live on the website, even as this information is now in a different format.

We cannot adequately express our excitement at what Synoptic Office has created, nor can we express the depth of our gratitude for their eagerness to support our dream and the care with which they created the design. We hope that you spend some time on the website and that it enchants and informs you in ways that extend and enrich this text. The music is our motivation; it inspired us to come together as an interdisciplinary group in the first place, and we are proud to center the music on the website to reach a larger audience. We invite you to explore more music and history at our website, singingjustice.org

Conclusion

While internet resources are accessible, increasingly compelling, and growing, it is important to remember traditional methods and sources for conducting research. Historical archives are full of scores, letters, and notes by Black musicians and composers across US history. Nearly all are free to visit and research. The internet is great for finding known information, but to discover the forgotten and the unknown requires firsthand, original detective work. Archives for further research include the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library and the National Museum for African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. The archives at historically Black colleges and universities are a critical frontier for Black music scholarship; these institutions house troves of important and underutilized archives and resources about Black music and Black history. Collections donated by individual musicians, composers, scholars, and teachers can also be found in various libraries, museums, churches, and other institutions across the United States and throughout the world.

Epilogue

Where Do We Go from Here?

In my formal music education, I had studied only the classical Western European canon. From singing in choirs, playing the piano, and taking music classes I knew I had to learn more. I was fortunate to have been part of a family where lots of different types of music forged connections between us, and we listened heartily. I grew up enfolded within my mother's classically trained voice singing around the house, as we traveled together in the car, and as a frequent guest soloist in churches. At home, with friends, and at live performances, music was a regular soundtrack. My aunt and uncle were avid jazz fans and brought me to my first jazz events when I was in college. Uncle Denis was also an accomplished Irish fiddler, and like Aunt Helen had a keen ear for all types of music.

As my own academic interests and research turned to opera, I was thrilled to learn that there were composers who looked like me who wrote all types of music. I first learned about Duke Ellington's *A Drum Is a Woman* (1957) when noted jazz radio broadcaster and historian Phil Schaap (1951–2021) played it on his radio show at WKCR right before my opera show (cohosted with fellow Columbia University student Donald King) when Don and I were in college (Phil was already an alum). One evening we were running late to get to our every-other-Saturday-night opera show (the subways were delayed), and Phil played it because, he said, this is Ellington's opera and forms a good bridge between our two back-to-back shows on jazz and opera. I had no idea Ellington had written anything connected to opera. I first heard of William Grant Still through his "Afro-American" Symphony No. 1 (1930) and was over the moon to learn that he composed nine (!) operas. The first Still opera I saw was *Highway 1, USA*; it was in a performance Louise Toppin directed at the University of Michigan in 2019, when she first joined the faculty. A few years later I had the opportunity to see it a second time at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis (2021). I was excited about the sophistication of this small-scale elegant opera and am in the process of writing more about it; I have excerpted a portion for a song biography for Nate's tenor aria "What Does He Know of Dreams?"

For me, this Singing Justice project has been a godsend. We are a team of music people who think and care deeply about music. A lot of how I am reshaping my own view of music historiography in the United States has been learned in this collective. We are shining a light on Black music (what we are calling Black Song) from all genres that have been hidden in the shadows, out of sight from the mainstream music history textbooks that were available to me during my training. Belonging to this Singing Justice family helps me to feel much less lonely musically and a whole lot more optimistic for future music study and pedagogy.

—Naomi André

I am a historian broadly interested in Black history and culture, race relations, and whiteness in the United States since the Reconstruction era. My involvement with the Singing Justice Collective began as I was launching projects on sundown towns, blackface minstrelsy, and race in small-town America. I have a historical interest in those topics, and I'm also engaged in how to talk about these hard histories in the present in ways that could lead to remedy and repair. I've been working through those issues in my research, in the courses I teach, and in conversations with groups outside the academy. For this work, my collaboration with music scholars and performers came along at an ideal time. Two lessons from our collaboration have been especially meaningful to me.

First, music is a powerful, productive way to talk about hard history. Prior to our collaboration, I knew this on some level—I've long used music in classes—but I didn't fully appreciate just how useful it was in engaging in hard history until I saw students, church members, and other audiences grapple with difficult topics through the music. They were less guarded in their responses and eager even to talk about what they were hearing and how it related to race and history. The music also provided opportunities for audiences to hear a diversity of perspectives—from the music, from the performers, and in some cases from other audience members. It promoted practices of listening and empathy that are central to discussions of challenging topics. As my engagement with hard history continues, I will continue to turn to music, musicians, and music scholars to aid in that work.

Second, anti-racist training brought us together in a way that made our collaboration about race, music, and history possible. All of us came into this project committed to the goals of centering Black music and Black experiences. We all recognized the long history of racial injustice in this country, and we recognized that those injustices extend into the present. Even with that shared awareness and the enthusiasm for this work, the anti-racist training transformed our group. After that experience, we were able to be vulnerable with each other. The training fostered a kind of awareness, patience, and generosity that helped

shape our interactions. The experience helped us to more fully trust, respect, and understand one another. From there, we tapped into our unique experiences and training across potential hierarchies and differences. Our diversity became our strength. I saw us coming together as a community, and a family even. We cared about and cared for each other in a way that made possible the work we did with the seminar recitals, the book, and the website.

I will take these lessons into future collaborations, and I will treasure working with these brilliant and talented individuals.

—Stephen Berrey

Before I became involved with Singing Justice, I thought of myself as *just* a performer. My work is taking music from the page and bringing it to life. If before I joined this collective, someone had said that that makes me a scholar, I might just have laughed at them. However, I now realize that all good performances require scholarship. Performers are regularly charged to research historical context, language, style, and emotional context with the goal of crafting meaningful experiences for an audience member. That desire to dig deeper makes me a scholar.

There are so many brilliant minds and beautiful souls in this group that encouraged me to look inside and focus on the things I know, and then to be hungry to learn even more. With that in mind, I learned to not take for granted the musical experiences that did not come from my formal music education. So much of my lifelong training has been rooted in the gospel music and spirituals I heard from my grandmother when she was rocking me to sleep, or in my hometown church in South Carolina, or in the music I listened to with my mother and father. That lived experience, along with my love for concert music by Black composers, has become valuable to this group and how we look at Black Song.

For me, Singing Justice is more than the meetings, the seminar recitals, or even this book. Singing Justice has been a family. Each member has been supportive, loving, and caring in a way that is never required and rarely even expected from colleagues. We have looked after and encouraged one another in times of need, celebrated each other in triumph, and come together in fellowship. For example, our book sprint happened just a couple of days after my father's funeral. I wasn't sure how I would make it through a week of writing, but this group of people rallied around me in ways I never expected. With their support, I went through this writing process honoring my father's legacy as the *ultimate* Black Song lover, and I couldn't be more pleased to see it to this final state. I cannot thank the Singing Justice Collective enough for their lasting impact on my life and career.

—Tyrese Byrd

Being part of the Singing Justice Collective has changed me and changed how I practice scholarship. In graduate school I came to understand research as a solo pursuit, one in which the individual scholar was engaged with the voices of colleagues only through their publications, not in face-to-face conversations or the exchange of pre-publication drafts. I was taught that this was a way to protect my own voice and avoid the risk of stealing the ideas of others. I did not consider at the time, however, that this approach delayed and restricted new perspectives from entering the conversation. It perpetuated the hegemonic voices of the academy; it limited change. Instead, learning with, through, and alongside my now friends in the Singing Justice Collective offered a new path.

Collaborative work, especially that which intentionally breaks through hegemonic barriers, offers not only a more productive and just practice, but a model that my future work will follow. No one person understands all, so working alongside colleagues not only brings us closer to the full picture, it simply raises the quality of the work. Diversity is important not just because it better reflects the range of possible perspectives and interpretations, but because it enables excellence.

Collaboration is also hard work. It demands generosity, vulnerability, and, especially in scholarship, the willingness to share credit with others. The benefits, however, far outweigh the required investments.

—Mark Clague

Like many people in the United States, I began studying and making music in a school band. I grew up listening to all sorts of music on the radio and CDs, but I really started to make music and to nurture my love of music in the band. I was a proud “band geek” all the way through college. Many of my teachers and peers explicitly or implicitly placed a great importance on understanding band music within the tradition of classical or Western art music. Similarly, my college education in music used classical music as the main lens for studying all music. There were dissenting voices and others providing nuance, but this was the dominant narrative. As a young white man, I leaned into this view and studied classical music, looking at it as the subject that would allow me to study music rigorously. I also went to college during the first wave of Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the deaths of many Black Americans at the hands of racist institutions and racist individuals. Outside the classroom, I heard voices challenging political and cultural institutions. These voices encouraged me to reckon with race and privilege in new ways. I learned to challenge the biases that had led me to privilege classical music above other styles. When I chose to become a musicologist, this was the context that led me to study the music of the United States and to focus on the ways that race and racism shape American music.

I am immensely grateful to be a part of Singing Justice. This project deepened my relationship with the music and culture around me in many unexpected and meaningful ways. I feel that my involvement in Singing Justice has given me a cohort of collaborators who I can turn to, and a blueprint for cooperative scholarship. Everyone in Singing Justice is a talented and skillful individual. We bring expertise and knowledge from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. I am constantly surprised and amazed by the people in this group. However, it is the diversity and the collaboration of this group that is its real strength. This might sound like a cliché, but it is the truth of this collaboration.

In my eyes, Singing Justice has worked because we intentionally cultivated a space that would be conducive for everyone to participate and contribute. As a group, we made the decision to talk openly about the ways that race, sex and gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, nationality, and even region impact us. I think by acknowledging and reckoning with those features of our identities at various points throughout our collaboration, we built a stronger group that was better equipped to work together and to deal with hard topics honestly. When you read this book, you are reading the ideas that we developed in intense conversation and discussion. I do not believe this project is dominated by the voices of those with more social or institutional power.

I hope the reader of this book will come away from it with new knowledge about music, but more importantly, I hope the reader will come away looking at all the ways that different peoples and different music are intertwined. As a result of this project, I look skeptically at the barriers of genre that we cultivate in the way we talk and think about music. I see *Black Song* as offering a way to think holistically about how many different sounds, styles, and musicians can exist in shared spaces and shape one another. I see the musicians and thinkers that we talk about in this book directly reveling in their differences and challenging themselves and others to find justice and community despite those differences. I have adapted many of the things I learned and experienced in Singing Justice to help me be a better scholar and teacher, and I hope our readers will be inspired similarly to look honestly at the diversity of the world around them and to look critically at all the systems of power and the actions of individuals that hold back justice in our world.

—Cody Ebright-Jones

I am extremely grateful to have had this opportunity to be part of the Singing Justice group as a nonprofit managing director, researcher, and project manager, as well as an artist myself. I was lucky to have experienced a solidly middle-class childhood in a suburb of Philadelphia as the daughter of two pharmacists, descendants of white working-class Irish and Polish immigrants. My natural

inclination never left a question in my mind that I would pursue the life of an artist, striving for connection with people of different backgrounds, traditions, and life experiences through shared beauty and bravery, and seeking new and uncomfortable situations to test my own abilities to empathize with other humans. I always knew that singing and music would be the core of this drive.

Only in retrospect did I realize how important the diverse atmosphere of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (where I pursued my undergraduate work), was in priming me for new cultural experiences at home and abroad. UMBC is still ranked as one of the most ethnically diverse schools in the United States, but it seemed unremarkable to me to be both white and a minority on that campus. My interest and need for connection, especially in understanding race in everyday American society, became central to my personal goals and artistry. My endeavors with the Hampsong Foundation have always supported this work, from comanaging a festival of music by Black composers at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, to organizing an educator workshop for 400 music teachers through the NYC Department of Education focused on the music of H. T. Burleigh.

Singing Justice has deepened my knowledge of Black Song, not only on an intellectual level, but on a very emotional and personal level. Of course, the research and learning outcomes have been immense, but the individual relationships and navigation of hard but important discussions and issues in the group will remain central to my lifelong devotion to communicating the stories and beauty of Black Song. I am grateful for and deeply value each and every member of this group.

—Christie Finn

I have always been a singer and a music-maker, from early childhood, and my eclectic tastes were shaped by formal training, amateur musician role models in my family and community, and the culture of the late '60s and '70s. From church hymns to bluegrass to musical theatre to Soul Train and the Top 40, I never met a song I didn't like to sing. I also grew up in the South in the aftermath of the civil rights era, with parents who believed strongly in equality and justice, which gave me a value system that guides me to this day. I became a classical singer and eventually a voice teacher, but always felt regret that I couldn't make more of a difference in the world because I was "just a singer." But an opportunity arose in 2004, when Emery Stephens, a Black graduate student in our voice program, asked me to collaborate with him on a project designed to bring singers of all ethnicities together through the performance of spirituals and art songs by African American composers, and I thought, "I will use my gift, my passion, and my position as a university professor to do what I

can to make a difference, even if it's just in music." That one small step changed the trajectory of my professional career and led me to this transformative collaboration with the brilliant members of Singing Justice.

Our collaboration has reinforced many beliefs that I already held: that the act of singing a song has the power to change the performer through embodied empathy; that music transfers emotion much more eloquently than words can; and that music brings people together in community. Our collaboration has also taught me many more things: that my desire to make a difference should be tempered by listening to Black voices; that trust is the foundation for hard conversations and collaboration as well as music-making; and that trust must be earned through thoughtful and genuine interactions over time. As a white singer, it has been such a privilege to be welcomed into Black spaces to share music and talk about Black Song and to have colleagues who are willing to tell me when I'm missing something because I'm looking through my white lens. I am particularly struck by the respect that is shared across disciplines and generations in our group, in that the insights and writing of performers are treated as equally valuable to those of the scholars and historians, and that our younger group members' voices are so strong in our book. The impact of our research has been multiplied elevenfold by our combined wisdom and diverse perspectives, and the impact of our friendship will resonate in me for the rest of my life.

—Caroline Helton

As a cultural historian and ethnomusicologist of Black American music, I research the ways that Black music has been used to foster Black community development. Growing up in Kansas City in a working-class Black community, I experienced the ways that Black music was incorporated into everyday living, encouraging people and helping them to celebrate, grieve, love, and heal. Also, I studied classical music from elementary through college but always considered it a style of music outside of the Black community. I saw it as training music, or music used to educate, but not as applicable to the Black experience in the ways that I saw the blues, gospel, jazz, R&B, and hip-hop being experienced in the lived spaces within the all-Black communities I frequented throughout the country. I did not fully understand how deeply music in the classical tradition had been integrated into the music of the Black community and used for self-expression.

Spending so much time with my Singing Justice colleagues, I began to understand the depth of musical diversity within the Black community and its expression, to include classical music and opera as part of the Black American music experience. My experience with Singing Justice exposed me to how classical music is also Black Song, and to how deeply opera training has been embed-

ded into Black music education in major urban areas since the late nineteenth century, shaping vocal traditions in these areas. I now understand that music of the Black experience in America includes almost any style of music one can think of.

The knowledge I acquired from my Singing Justice colleagues helped me to expand my understanding of my own research on the origins of blues-based music and how well jazz icons like Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, and Ron Carter were trained in Kansas City, Chicago, and Detroit to appreciate and perform classical music. I recognized that although some music has a special importance to some groups because of its cultural origins, music is simply music, and that African Americans choose to express themselves in a variety of ways, musically to tell of the Black experience.

—Traci Lombré

I came to our project as a senior faculty member who had been a professor of voice, a head of a music department, an international professional singer, and a leading voice in Black classical song, and yet I wasn't sure what I had to contribute to our project on Black Song!! As a young faculty member, I enjoyed working in collaboration with others, but the nature of my career in more recent years and the pandemic turned my work into a more solitary endeavor. It has been a delight to work with colleagues, including two of my own voice students in conversations that I am not sure would have occurred organically. This work has reminded me of the joys of collaboration and learning from others without an emphasis on hierarchy.

One project takeaway that is applicable to life helped us to coalesce as a group: the concept of “listening to listen, not listening to respond.” By doing so, we leave space to learn from each other and figure out together the many creative ways we can teach Black history through music, although we are living in an era of restrictions on the teaching of African American history. It is critical that we teach this history, and music is our path to engaging not only with repertoire but with historical narratives and concepts.

I am grateful for the experience of being in such a dynamic group of scholar-performers who are now my lifelong friends and collaborators. I will eagerly seek out and accept opportunities to work with others in such a collaborative manner should the opportunity arise in the future! I am profoundly grateful to this team and the University of Michigan Humanities Collaboratory that brought eleven semi-strangers together to form what is now a cohesive team of collaborators and lifelong friends.

—Louise Toppin

When I joined Singing Justice, I was feeling lost in my graduate studies. While I'd trained in opera, I was increasingly disillusioned with the opera industry and felt that there was a growing gap between my classical music training and the art that spoke to issues that felt relevant to me, that spoke to marginalized communities, and that reflected the musical practices I'd grown up with. I'd spent the months of the COVID-19 shutdown attending George Floyd protests in Washington, DC, and I was struggling to find places to bring this pressing reality into my graduate studies meaningfully. The Singing Justice project gave me a place where all the varied elements of my personhood and my interests were not just welcomed, but the juxtaposition of my artistic identities was valued.

This experience was instrumental in providing me the launching pad that helped me become the crossover artist and independent producer that I am now. The opportunity to practice my collaborative leadership skills and to be a thought partner on equal footing with the brilliant members of the Singing Justice team was invaluable to my development. The faculty did an incredible job of welcoming graduate students to the table and empowering us to take agency and ownership and to challenge as we saw fit. Through this experience I learned the importance of each members' unique insights and voice to the overall success of the whole group. Learning to value my own insights, even if I didn't have as many degrees or lacked certain experiences within the Singing Justice group, gave me the confidence to advocate for my ideas in the other multigenerational communities I was a part of over the last five years. That my insights as a younger person were valued alongside those of the rest of the team, and that I became skilled at collaborative leadership styles, propelled me into numerous art leadership opportunities that I previously wouldn't have pursued.

The creation of the seminar recitals, a true synthesis of all the ideas and specialties of the members of the SJ team, was an answer to my quest to bridge the gap between my classical musical training and the advocacy work I felt drawn to. The success of the seminar recital model helped reduce my disillusionment about the inaccessibility of academia, as I could see in real time how we were able to use these performances to blend theory with practice. The seminar recital concept has deeply influenced my work as an artist, creative producer, and community outreach director. I now feel empowered as an artist and arts leader to think outside of the box to find ways to deeply engage audiences and make a meaningful impact.

—Samantha Rose Williams

Appendix

Classroom Activity

A Guide to Designing Seminar Recitals

Seminar recitals present music and its historical context together while inviting the audience to share, interact, and discuss related topics, potentially with performers and composers if it is a live event. To design a seminar recital, it is helpful to consider the following parameters:

- **Audience.** Who are they? What historical knowledge or musical training do they have? What might they know about the music already? What is the racial, gender, and ethnic composition of the audience?
- **Learning objectives.** What do you hope the audience will take away from this experience? What knowledge do you want to impart, or what skills do you want them to develop? What issues related to the past or present do you want them to work through as a group?
- **Research questions.** What do you want to learn about your audience and how they understand the music presented? What context might you need to provide to help participants situate the music within its historical context and cultural tradition?
- **Repertoire.** Drawing on your learning objectives and research questions, consider what music to include in the program. Of course, the availability of singers and the appropriate accompanying ensemble is a factor in determining the repertoire. Still, your educational goal should provide the rationale for establishing the completed program. Develop a narrative arc through the recital, grouping works with specific features and preparing remarks that introduce and contextualize the music. Offer framing questions you want the audience to consider as they listen. A slide presentation that includes photographs of composers, background information, and lyrics (if applicable) is helpful if the venue supports that technology. We've found that a 60- to 90-minute program with ample time for interaction is ideal. Allow time for a concise (5 minutes or less) historical introduction to each piece, the performance, and then Q&A

or whatever interaction you envision. While you may want your audience to grapple with difficult topics, a program filled with emotionally challenging material may overwhelm or even traumatize your audience. Include music that showcases multiple themes and a range of emotional responses, including joy and triumph.

- **Performers.** If working with student performers, help guide them in how they come to the music, especially if it addresses challenging themes. What knowledge or context do they need? What emotional considerations should be taken into account? For additional ideas, see our suggestions for working with performers in the discussion “Singing Down the Barriers” in chapter 7.
- **Data collection and interaction.** How do you want your audience to engage? Options include
 - *Surveys.* Ask listeners to fill out a survey before the performance or present a post-concert survey to identify shifts in opinion.
 - *Polling.* Ask questions following a performance seeking listener opinions that can be submitted via smartphone or computer. For example, after hearing a version of “Hound Dog,” we asked audience members to respond to the question, “Does the race of the performer matter?” Consider allowing anonymity in your polling to reduce social pressure to endorse certain answers.
 - *Small-group discussion.* Have audience members talk in pairs or small groups, focusing on how the music made them feel, what they learned, or what surprised them.
 - *Large-group discussion.* Have the group comment and ask questions. We have found that especially fruitful interactions come from audience members asking questions of performers, such as how they trained or prepared to sing a particular song or how they felt while performing something that explored a difficult topic.
 - *Post-performance feedback.* Some audiences, such as students, might be asked to write short essays reflecting on the performance based on a prompt. We have also found it effective to ask listeners to write about their emotional responses to particular songs.
- **Venue.** What technological support will you need? If you include slides with some information about each song (recommended), how will those slides be projected? How big is the stage, and does it have a piano? If you are planning to perform classical repertoire, amplification won’t be necessary, but if your program includes popular songs or jazz, you may need to plan for amplification to support the vocalism of those genres.
- **Recording.** Will you stream or record the performance? If streaming or

recording, consider turning the recording off for the conversation portion at the end of the recital to allow audience members the freedom to present responses or reflections, which can sometimes be personal.

- Overall, the most important consideration is to design the seminar recital to nurture a supportive learning environment that enables an honest and courageous conversation and allows the audience opportunities to process the material. It is also valuable to have a moderator who can improvise if additional context, explanation, or discussion is needed.

Duke University Music

A Century of Black Song: Singing
Down the Barriers with Art Songs

Louise Toppin and Friends

• • •

Louise Toppin, soprano and narrator

John O'Brien, piano

Tyrese Byrd, tenor

Lori Hicks, composer and soprano

Jaki Shelton Green, poet

Regina Harris Baiocchi, composer

Anthony "Ay-Jaye" Nelson Jr., choreographer and dancer

October 22, 2022

8:00 p.m.

Nelson Music Room

East Duke Building

Program

Peter Quince at the Clavier

Anthony Kelley

A. Acknowledging Our Past

James Weldon Johnson:

Sence You Went Away

J. Rosamond Johnson

Tyrese Byrd

Sence You Went Away

Leslie Adams

Louise Toppin

Anthony "Ajaye" Nelson Jr. —dancer

Sence You Went Away

Lori Hicks

Lori Hicks

B. A Celebration of Blackness***The Black Experience***

David Baker

I Who Would Encompass Millions
 The Insurgent
 Status Symbol
 A Good Assassination Should Be Quiet
 The Rebel
 The Alarm Clock
 Early in the Morning

*Louise Toppin and Tyrese Byrd***Langston Hughes:**

Dream Variations

Margaret Bonds

Dream Variations

Undine Smith Moore

Louise Toppin

Dream Variations

Brandon Spencer

*Tyrese Byrd**Intermission***C. Home**

Poem

Maria Corley

Louise Toppin

I Want to Die While You Love Me

Rosephanye Powell
 (Georgia Douglas Johnson, poet)

Tyrese Byrd

I Want to Die While You Love Me

Undine Smith Moore

Lori Hicks

Poetry reading by Jaki Shelton Green, North Carolina poet laureate

I Want to Undie You

Regina Baiocchi

Reflections/conversation

D. Spiritual connections

Stand by Me
Whom Shall I Fear

William Banfield

Songs of Love and Justice
Decisions

Adolphus Hailstork

Louise Toppin

Presented by Duke Humanities Unbounded Lab, "Black Music and the Soul of America," with the Singing Justice Team of the Humanities Collaboratory at the University of Michigan.

Singing Justice: Black Song since the 1950s

featuring students from the University of Michigan
Department of Musical Theatre

Maya Boyd

Ian Coursey

Aidan Jones

Kate Louissaint

Angel Ordonez

Keyon Pickett Jr

Keyboard: Casey Baker

Drums: Ethan Van Slyke

Bass: Zac Mitchell

I. *Aquarius/Let the Sun Shine In*
from Hair

Music: Galt MacDermot

Lyrics: Jerome Ragni
and James Rado

Company

II. *Summertime* from Porgy and Bess

Music: George Gershwin

Libretto: DuBose Heyward

Maya Boyd

III. *Strange Fruit*

Music and lyrics by Abel Meeropol

Kate Louissaint

IVa. *Hound Dog*

(recorded in 1952 by Big Mama
Thornton)

Music by Mike Stoller

Lyrics by Jerry Leiber

Angel Ordonez

IVb. *Hound Dog*

(recorded in 1956 by Elvis Presley)

Ian Coursey

**V. *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn
Us Around***

African American Spiritual

Company

VI. *Blowin' in the Wind*

Music and lyrics by Bob Dylan

Ian Coursey

VII. *A Change Is Gonna Come*

Music and lyrics by Sam Cooke

Aidan Jones

VIIIa. *Respect*

Music and lyrics by Otis Redding

(recorded in 1965 by Otis Redding)

Keyon Pickett Jr.

VIIIb. *Respect*

(recorded in 1967 by Aretha
Franklin)

Angel Ordonez

IX. *Home* from The Wiz

Music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls

Maya Boyd

X. *Wheels of a Dream* from Ragtime

Music by Stephen Flaherty

Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

Kate Louissaint

Aidan Jones

Company

A Singing Justice Seminar Recital

October 16, 2023
North Carolina Central University

Joshua Marzan, pianist
Caroline Helton, speaker

Exploring Assumptions and Expectations

The Complaint (Shakespeare)	Ignatius Sancho
Gardé Piti Mulet Là	Maud Cuney Hare
(Louisiana Creole poem)	
Colleen Beucher, soprano	

Spirituals: The Bedrock of American Song

Lord, How Come Me Here?	Traditional
Louise Toppin, soprano	
My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord	Florence Price
Colleen Beucher, soprano	
Give Me Jesus	Moses Hogan
Samantha Williams, mezzo-soprano	
I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired	Jacqueline Hairston
Tyrese Byrd, tenor	

American Classic Song Has European Roots: Settings of 19th Century Poetry by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal	Roger Quilter
Colleen Beucher, soprano	
Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal	Harry T. Burleigh
Tyrese Byrd, tenor	

Centering Black Song: Black Poets Tell an American Story Behind the Veil of Race: Langston Hughes

Dream Variations from	Margaret Bonds
Three Dream Portraits	
Samantha Williams, mezzo-soprano	

Dream Variations		Brandon Spencer
	Tyrese Byrd, tenor	

Dream Variations		Richard Thompson
	Colleen Beucher, soprano	

Intermission

*Black Women Speak: Georgia Douglas Johnson,
Zora Neale Hurston, and Olivia Johnson*

I Want to Die While You Love Me		Rosephanye Powell
	Tyrese Byrd, tenor	

I Want to Die While You Love Me		Undine Smith Moore
	Colleen Beucher, soprano	

I Am Not Tragically Colored from		Regina Baiocchi
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Hurston Songs

<i>Black Girl Dreaming</i>		B. E. Boykin
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Black Girl

The Black Sinner

Samantha Williams, mezzo-soprano

A Time Capsule in Song: James Weldon Johnson

Since You Went Away (1913)		J. Rosamond Johnson
	Tyrese Byrd, tenor	

Sence You Went Away (1961)		Leslie Adams
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Sence you went away (2014)		Lori Hicks
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Louise Toppin, soprano

Notes

Foreword

1. From an interview with Studs Terkel, anthologized in *Conversations with James Baldwin* (University Press of Mississippi, 1989).
2. This quote is attributed to Paul Robeson and was referenced by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his PBS special *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (2014).

Introduction

1. Nikole Hannah-Jones et al., “Special Edition: The 1619 Project,” ed. Jake Silverstein, *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>. The project has since been expanded and published in book form as *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Illena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (One World, 2021).
2. *The 1619 Project* includes three entries on music: Wesley Morris, “For Centuries, Black Music, Forged in Bondage, Has Been the Sound of Complete Artistic Freedom. No Wonder Everybody Is Always Stealing It,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/music-black-culture-appropriation.html>; Nikole Hannah-Jones, host, *1619*, podcast, produced by Andy Mills and Annie Brown, edited by Larissa Anderson and Lisa Chow, “Episode 3: The Birth of American Music,” featuring Wesley Morris, New York Times Audio, September 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/06/podcasts/1619-black-american-music-appropriation.html>; Morris, “Music” in Hannah-Jones et al., *The 1619 Project*, 359–79.
3. We choose to capitalize the “B” in Black and to use a lowercase “w” in white. Our reasons closely mirror those published by the Associated Press, who capitalize “Black” to convey “an essential and shared sense of history, identity, and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa.” In our writing, Black is often a synonym for African American, which we capitalize. On not capitalizing “white,” the Associated Press contends that white people “generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color.” While we recognize the presence of white racial identities, we generally agree with this assessment. As well, many mem-

bers of our collective understand the capitalization of “white” as affirming power and privilege that was already well recognized, ideologically embedded, and hegemonic within US society. “Explaining AP Style on Black and White,” *Associated Press*, July 20, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/archive-race-and-ethnicity-9105661462>. For more on this issue, see John Eligon, “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black?’” *New York Times*, June 26, 2020; Nell Irvin Painter, “Why ‘White’ Should Be Capitalized, Too,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 2020.

4. The George Shirley Vocal Competition: African American Vocal Repertoire is an annual competition held at the University of Michigan since 2010. We discuss this competition and George Shirley in chapter 8.

5. While we developed our notion of Black Space independently, we came to appreciate a philosophical affinity with the BlackSpace Urbanist Collective, a collective of architects, urban planners, and designers that centers equity and supports heritage conservation in Black and marginalized communities. See BlackSpace Urbanist Collective, accessed on July 18, 2025, <https://blackspace.org/>

6. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 in part to understand and name the endeavors and legacy of Black activists from Sojourner Truth and her 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” to Anna Julia Cooper’s 1892 essay “The Colored Woman’s Office,” as well as the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois (who notably wrote on the intersection of race, class, and nation, but omitted gender) and up through the 1981 feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, Article 8 (1989): 139–67; Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 4th ed. (State University of New York Press, 2015).

7. The Singing Down the Barriers Institute is an intensive summer workshop hosted by the School of Music, Theatre & Dance at the University of Michigan. It was developed by Singing Justice members Louise Toppin and Caroline Helton, among others. We discuss this workshop in Chapter 8.

Chapter 1

1. Deepa Lakshmin, “There’s ‘No Best Musician,’ Says Grammy Winner Jon Batiste,” *MTV*, April 4, 2022, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.mtv.com/news/nh5f1rw/jon-batiste-album-of-the-year-grammys>

2. This concept connects with Christopher Small’s concept of “musicking.” Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

3. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs in the United States* (A. Simpson & Co, 1867).

4. James Monroe Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Lee and Shepard, 1878).

5. Maud Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and their Music* (Associated Publishers, 1936); James Weldon Johnson, ed., *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, musical arrangements by J. Rosamond Johnson (Viking Press, 1940), originally published in two editions: *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925) and *The Second Book of*

Negro Spirituals (1926); Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936). For a detailed historiography of Black American music in this period, see Guthrie Ramsey, “Cosmopolitan or Provincial? Ideology in Early Black Music Historiography, 1867–1940,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 11–42.

6. *Black, Brown and Beige*, by Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, featuring Mahalia Jackson, Columbia CL 1162, 1958.

7. Langston Hughes, *The First Book of Jazz*, pictures by Cliff Roberts, music selected by David Martin (Franklin Watts, Inc., 1955); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (W. W. Norton, 1997; 1st ed., 1971); Olly Wilson, “Black Music as an Art Form,” *Black Music Research Journal* 3 (1983): 1–22; Mellonee V. Burnim, and Portia K. Maultsby, *African American Music: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2015; 1st ed., 2006).

8. As with scatting, a singing technique without words where the human voice mimics what might be played on an instrument, instruments such as a guitar, saxophone, or trumpet used with a plunger are also a substitute for a human voice. Hence, instrumental music can also be Black Song.

9. Robin D. G. Kelley makes this observation in reference to James Gordon Williams’s conceptualization of “Black musical space.” Robin D. G. Kelley, foreword to James Gordon Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines: The Politics and Practices of Black Musical Space* (University Press of Mississippi, 2021), vii–viii.

10. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 3–22; Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1995); LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (W. Morrow, 1963).

11. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 265–87; Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 38, 42–47; Brenda Ellis, “Slave Music of the South,” in the *Encyclopedia of African American Music*, ed. Emmett G. Price III, Tammy L. Kernodle, and Horace J. Maxile Jr., vol. 3 (Greenwood, 2011), 881–82.

12. Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1971), 9.

13. Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Indiana University Press, 1998), 80–81, 89.

14. James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (Viking Press, 1933), 154–55. See also Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), and Burton W. Peretti, *Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

15. In 2021, Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina introduced a bill to establish the composition as the national hymn of the United States; he introduced it again in 2022; H.R. 301, 116th Cong. (2021), accessed on July 18, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/301>. Singing Justice Collective member Naomi André testified before the Committee on the Judiciary on February 4, 2022, to provide historical context supporting this proposal; Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the Committee on the Judiciary, US House of Representatives, 117th Cong. (2022) (statement of Naomi André, Professor, Arts and Ideas in the Humanities Program, Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, and Women’s Studies, University of Michigan); for André’s written state-

ment (dated February 2, 2022), see US House of Representatives Committee Repository, published February 4, 2022, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU10/20220204/114373/HHRG-117-JU10-Wstate-AndreN-20220204.pdf>

16. The song aired in stadiums and on television as a video with R&B artist Alicia Keys singing and actor Anthony Mackie narrating, with selected clips and photos of contemporary protests, various Black individuals, and historic images meant to highlight the history of anti-Blackness. The video aired at regular-season NFL games during the 2020 season and at the Super Bowl. Subsequent Super Bowls (as of 2026) have also featured a live or recorded pregame performance of the song. See the 2020 video at “‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’ Alicia Keys Performance with Narration by Anthony Mackie,” posted September 10, 2020, by the NFL, YouTube, e. See also Jessica Eley, “What Is the Black National Anthem? Alicia Keys Sings ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’ for Super Bowl,” *Fox 4 Kansas City*, February 7, 2021, <https://fox4kc.com/sports/chiefs/what-is-the-black-national-anthem-alicia-keys-sings-lift-every-voice-and-sing-for-super-bowl/>

17. For more on “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” see Perry, *May We Forever Stand*.

18. Johnson, *Along This Way*, 163.

19. Johnson, *Along This Way*, 154–55.

20. Johnson, *Along this Way*, 155.

21. Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), 14.

22. “NPC Luncheon with Ken Burns & Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,” National Press Club, March 14, 2016, 36:13–36:41, <https://www.press.org/newsroom/video/npc-luncheon-ken-burns-henry-louis-gates-jr>

23. Kelley, foreword to *Crossing Bar Lines*, vii–viii.

24. See James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Margo Natalie Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics* (University of Illinois Press, 2017); Jonathan Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement: Hoyt Fuller and the Cultural Politics of the 1960s* (University of Illinois Press, 2019).

25. Regina Harris Baiocchi, “Black Arts Movement,” in the *Encyclopedia of African American Music*, vol. 1, 60.

26. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 555; Eileen Southern, “America’s Black Composers of Classical Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 62, no. 3 (Nov. 1975): 56.

27. Thomas Chatterton Williams, “Not Like Us,” *The Atlantic*, May 19, 2024, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/05/drake-kendrick-lamar-race/678426/>

28. See, for example, Michael Eric Dyson, interviewed by Stephen A. Smith, *The Stephen A. Smith Show*, posted May 19, 2025, by Stephen A. Smith, YouTube, 30:25–35:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK9OGTX3tzc&t=9s>; Michael Eric Dyson, “Why Kendrick vs. Drake Is a Proxy War,” *Philadelphia Citizen*, May 15, 2024, <https://thephiladelphiacitizen.org/why-kendrick-vs-drake-is-a-proxy-war/>

29. Harry G. Lefever, “‘Playing the Dozens’: A Mechanism for Social Control,” *Phylon* 42, no. 1 (1981): 73–85. For more on the connections between Black childhood games and Black American music, see Kyra D. Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (New York University, 2006).

30. Kendrick Lamar, “euphoria,” released as a single, Interscope Records, 2024.
31. H. Rap Brown, *Die Nigger Die!* (Dial Press, 1969), 26–27.
32. For a sample of scholarship on the commodification of Black culture in popular music, see Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew D. Morrison, *Blacksound: Making Race and Popular Music in America* (University of California Press, 2024).
33. Ken Hamm, “PJ Morton Is Feeling a Bit ‘Claustrophobic,’” SoulBounce.com, April 27, 2015, <https://soulbounce.com/2015/04/pj-morton-is-feeling-a-bit-claustrophobic/>
34. “Claustrophobic (feat. Keyon Harrold)—Live,” by PJ Morton, track 2 on *Gumbo Unplugged (Live)*, Morton Records, 2018. Lyrics transcribed from recording.
35. See Morrison, *Blacksound*.
36. “Claustrophobic (feat. Keyon Harrold)—Live.”
37. Chelsea Brasted, “PJ Morton of Maroon 5 Moves Home to New Orleans, Opens Record Label,” NOLA.com, February 16, 2016, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/music/pj-morton-of-maroon-5-moves-home-to-new-orleans-opens-record-label/article_371adab3-0c87-58fd-a69c-24fb6d79e522.html
38. David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Canongate Books, 2013).
39. Holliday claims that she, “Lewis Allen” (Abel Meeropol), and Holliday’s accompanist Sonny White collaboratively set Meeropol’s poem to music. Billie Holliday and William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues*, reprinted with revised discography (Penguin Books, 1956), 84.
40. Richard Crouse, *Who Wrote the Book of Love? The Stories Behind the Hits—From Chuck Berry to Chumbawamba* (Doubleday, 1998), 13–16.
41. James M. Salem, *The Late Great Johnny Ace and the Transition from R&B to Rock ’n’ Roll* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 83; Ralph J. Gleason, “Big Mama Sings the Blues She Likes,” liner notes to *Big Mama Thornton with the Muddy Waters Blues Band* 1966, Arhoolie Records ARH09043, 2004, p. 5, retrieved from Smithsonian Folkways, <https://folkways.si.edu/big-mama-thornton-with-the-muddy-waters-blues-band-1966/blues/music/album/smithsonian>. Liner notes indicate that this essay is reprinted from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Examiner*. See also Maureen Mahon, *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll* (Duke University Press, 2020), 36–42.
42. Bell failed to get permission to revise the song and thus never copyrighted his changes or benefitted from Presley’s success. Leiber and Stoller, however, received the songwriting royalties.

Chapter 2

1. Jessica Lipsky, “Jon Batiste’s ‘Freedom’ Wins Best Music Video,” Recording Academy, April 3, 2022, <https://www.grammy.com/news/jon-batiste-wins-2022-grammy-best-music-video-freedom-we-are>
2. “FREEDOM,” by Jon Batiste, written by Jon Batiste, Autumn Rowe, and Andrae Alexander, track 10 on *WE ARE*, Verve Records, 2021; “Jon Batiste—FREEDOM,”

directed by Alan Ferguson, music video, posted June 10, 2021, by Jon Batiste, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YHVCiDcHmo>. Lyrics transcribed from the captions in the music video. The lyrics in italics are doubled by background singers, and the lyrics in parentheses are shouted or sung by different voices at the end of Batiste's line. In the first four lines, the lyrics are shouted in the style of James Brown. In the last three lines, they are sung in a very deep register.

3. "I NEED YOU," by Jon Batiste, written by Jon Batiste and Autumn Rowe, track 4 on *WE ARE*, Verve Records, 2021; "Jon Batiste—I NEED YOU," directed by Alan Ferguson, music video, posted January 21, 2021, by Jon Batiste, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXToosWwuTQ&list=RDAXToosWwuTQ&start_radio=1. Lyrics transcribed from the captions in the music video.

4. We use the term "radical" to describe the action of affirming Black humanity, not to refer to individual actors as "radicals." We are also drawing on a tradition of scholarship theorizing Blackness as relational and contextual, specifically as resulting from the cascading effects of chattel slavery in the Americas; see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016); and Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (Liveright, 2020). Similarly, João H. C. Vargas and Moon-Kie Jung refer to radical Black humanity as "a vital humanity that exceeds the present social world, one that operates according to ethical and aesthetic principles not reducible to normative parameters, one that categorically rejects dehumanization." Vargas and Jung, "Antiblackness of the Social and the Human," in *Antiblackness*, ed. Jung and Vargas (Duke University Press, 2021), 13. The radicality of affirming humanity for subaltern populations can be found in works such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 2015), 70–107; and Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 183–201.

5. "The BlackSpace Manifesto" was developed by BlackSpace NYC, "a collective of over two dozen active professionals with experience in urban planning, architecture, real estate development, urban design, and the arts," accessed May 27, 2024, <https://blackspace.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/BlackSpace-Manifesto.pdf>

6. Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* (Basic Books, 2003), 82; Rashad Shabazz, "Masculinity and the Mic: Confronting the Uneven Geography of Hip-hop," *Gender, Place & Culture* 21, no. 3 (2014): 371.

7. For a sample of academic discourse at the intersection of feminism, decoloniality, and race, see bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989): 15–23; Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 233–57; Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 1 (2016): 947–63.

8. Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines*.

9. Kelley, foreword to *Crossing Bar Lines*, ix.
10. Kelley, foreword to *Crossing Bar Lines*, ix.
11. Jim Crow was a series of systems and practices established to create and enforce the legal, physical, and economic segregation of people based on race across the United States. Jim Crow was most widespread in the period from the 1890s until the 1960s. In the South, laws and customs ensured that the best spaces (cleanest, most convenient, best-equipped, etc.) were reserved for white people and unavailable to Black people. Outside the South, Jim Crow practices such as redlining, restrictive covenants, and total exclusion from some towns (sundown towns) served a similar function. For an overview of Jim Crow, see Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* (St. Martin's Press, 2002).
12. Stephen Small, "The Contours of Racialization: Structures, Representations, and Resistance in the United States," in *Race, Identity, and Citizenship: A Reader*, ed. Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Miron, and Jonathan Xavier Inda (Blackwell, 1999), 50.
13. Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (University of Illinois Press, 1977), 8.
14. Lyrics transcribed from the recording by Marian Anderson and accompanying liner notes; "Lord, How Come Me Here?" adapted by Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, arranged by Sylvia Olden Lee, track 5 on Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman, *Spirituals in Concert*, recorded March 18, 1990, Deutsche Grammophon, 1991.
15. For scholarship on Black families and communities during enslavement, see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (Vintage, 1977); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1979); Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford University Press, 1996); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Harvard University Press, 2017).
16. For an overview of Black institution-building and desires for autonomy following emancipation, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).
17. "Living with Segregation," Partners of the Heart, *American Experience*, Public Broadcasting Service, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/partners-living-segregation/>
18. On abolitionism in the antebellum United States, see Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (Oxford University Press, 1969); Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton University Press, 1991); Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Harvard University Press, 1997); and Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (Yale University Press, 2016).
19. Throughout the Jim Crow era, African Americans challenged Jim Crow restrictions. For a turn-of-the-century example, see Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For everyday challenges, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Free Press, 1996). For an over-

view of responses to Jim Crow in the urban North and West, see Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Random House, 2008).

20. Tammy Kernodle, “Detroit, Michigan,” in the *Encyclopedia of African American Music*, vol. 1, 279.

21. For more on Motown’s roots in Detroit, see Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

22. For some musical features commonly associated with African American music, see the list in chapter 1 of this book.

23. Katrina Hazzard-Donald, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formation in African-American Culture* (Temple University Press, 1990), 76–77.

24. Hazzard-Donald, *Jookin’*, 77.

25. Hazzard-Donald, *Jookin’*, 78–79. Zora Neale Hurston discussed “jook joint” in her writings, including in her 1934 essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” reprinted in *Sweat*, ed. Cheryl Wall (Rutgers University Press, 1997), 55–71. A recent representation of the jook joint was featured in Ryan Coogler’s film *Sinners* (Warner Bros., 2025).

26. For more on blues music, blues spaces, and early jazz, see Jones, *Blues People*; William R. Ferris, *Blues from the Delta* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978); and Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (Pantheon Books, 1998).

27. Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines*, 3, 5.

28. Jones, *Blues People*, 26–27: “The work song took on its own peculiar qualities in America . . . singing to accompany one’s labor was quite common in West Africa . . . references to the gods or religions of Africa were suppressed [in America] . . . too constant evocation of the African gods could mean that those particular Africans were planning on leaving that plantation as soon as they could. . . . The African slave continued to chant his native chants, sing his native songs, at work, even though the singing of them might be forbidden or completely out of context. . . . No one can simply decree that a man change the way he thinks.”

29. For more on the ring shout and its legacies see Floyd Jr., “Ring Shout!”; and Katrina Hazzard-Donald, *Mojo Workin’: The Old African American Hoodoo System* (University of Illinois Press, 2013).

30. Bernice Reagon Johnson, “The Songs Are Free,” interview by Bill Moyers, February 6, 1991, archived at billmoyers.com, May 19, 2015, <https://billmoyers.com/content/songs-free/>

31. Bernice Johnson Reagon, keynote address, 15th Annual Liberal Arts Symposium, Berklee College of Music, Boston, Massachusetts, 2009, quoted in Fred Bouchard, “Bernice Johnson Reagon on Freedom Fighting,” *College News*, Berklee College of Music, April 10, 2009, <https://college.berklee.edu/news/634/bernice-johnson-reagon-on-freedom-fighting>

32. See Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Duke University Press, 2010).

33. Cruz, *Culture on the Margins*, 27–34.

34. For more scholarship exploring the relationship between blackface minstrelsy and stereotypes of blackness, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 17–48; Morrison, *Blacksound*; Lott, *Love and Theft*.

35. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García, “Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education,” *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 9, no. 2 (1998): 117–25.

36. Emery Stephens and Caroline Helton, *Singing Down the Barriers: A Guide to Centering African American Song for Concert Performers* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 115.

37. Stephens and Helton, *Singing Down the Barriers*, 115.

38. Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning in the New York Jazz Scene* (University of California Press, 2012), 3. See, for example, the House Resolution introduced by Rep. John Conyers in 1987, “A Concurrent Resolution Expressing the Sense of Congress Respecting the Designation of Jazz as a Rare and Valuable National American Treasure,” H.R. Res. 57, 100th Congress (1987).

39. For an example of jazz framed as “America’s classical music,” see Grover Sales, *Jazz: America’s Classical Music* (Prentice-Hall, 1984), 3. For more discussion of this concept, see Tom Arnold-Forster, “Dr. Billy Taylor, ‘America’s Classical Music,’ and the Role of the Jazz Ambassador,” *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 117–39; and Jon Pareles, “Don’t Call Jazz America’s Classical Music,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1999.

40. Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away*, 4.

41. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 51.

42. Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, 171.

43. Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, 173; Sidran, *Black Talk*, 105.

44. Joshua Renick, “Jazz, Democracy, and Dewey: Toward Alternatives in Jazz Education,” in *Complicated Conversations & Confirmed Commitments: Revitalizing Education for Democracy*, ed. Jake Burdick, Jennifer A. Sandlin, and Toby Daspit (Educator’s International Press, 2009), 7.

45. J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (W. W. Norton, 1974), 206, quoted in Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, 41.

46. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 214.

47. Knowledge of “standards” is necessary for impromptu community performances, and for training, because they introduce musicians to various musical forms as examples to which they can apply music theory as a basis for improvisation. Note that jazz standards are not to be equated with a “canon,” as in the case of classical music; see our discussion of canons in chapter 5.

48. Mellonee V. Burnim, “The Black Gospel Music Tradition: A Complex of Ideology, Aesthetic, and Behavior,” in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Greenwood, 1985), 159, quoted in Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, 40.

49. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 1.

50. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 47.

51. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 47.

52. Joshua Renick, “Jazz, Democracy, and Dewey,” 8.

53. Eitan Wilf, *School for Cool: The Academic Jazz Program and the Paradox of Institutionalized Creativity* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 51.

54. Wilf, *School for Cool*, 51.

55. Award-winning female drummer and educator Terri Lyne Carrington is the founder and artistic director of the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice at

Berklee College of Music in Boston. This initiative addresses patriarchy and equity in the male-dominated field of jazz. The institute's work also recovers women's contributions to jazz. For more information, see "Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice," Berklee College of Music, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://college.berklee.edu/jazz-gender-justice>

56. Both Damani Phillips and Wilf discuss the emphasis on mastering technical proficiency over transmitting emotion through performance, comparing institutional jazz instruction and nonacademic jazz training. See Damani Phillips, *What Is This Thing Called Soul: Conversations on Black Culture and Jazz Education* (Peter Lang, 2017); Wilf, *School for Cool*.

Chapter 3

1. "Jon Batiste—WE ARE (Visualizer)," produced by Brian Mcelroy, music video, posted June 1, 2021, by Jon Batiste, YouTube, https://youtu.be/MkpVNaBeomg?si=aZ_YXoYyWDDfwfCD

2. "WE ARE," by Jon Batiste, written by Jon Batiste, Autumn Rowe, and Kizzo, track 1 on *WE ARE*, Verve Records, 2021. Lyrics transcribed by Cody Ebright-Jones from the recording. The first four lines of the chorus are sung by the chorus. We hear only Batiste's voice singing the final two lines.

3. Historian Edmund S. Morgan offers an analysis of how slavery fits within popular concepts of American identity at the time of the founding in *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (W. W. Norton, 1975). For a general account of how slavery was implemented and rationalized in the United States, see Heather Andrea Williams, *American Slavery: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), especially chapters 2 and 4. For a general account of the impact of slavery in the Americas on the economies of Africa, the Americas, and Europe, see Peter Coclanis, "The Economics of Slavery," in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, ed. Mark M. Smith and Robert L. Paquette (Oxford University Press, 2010), 489–512.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2nd ed. (A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 250–65; see also Delridge La Veon Hunter, "Sorrow Songs: An Early Form of the Blues," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of African Cultural Heritage in North America*, ed. Mwalimu J. Shujaa and Kenya J. Shujaa (SAGE, 2015), 778–80.

5. John Lovell Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame, the Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (Macmillan, 1972), 113–16; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 199–201; Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, 39–42.

6. For more on Undine Smith Moore, see Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies*, 51–92.

7. Undine Smith Moore, "Watch and Pray (1972)," in *Art Songs and Spirituals by African-American Women Composers*, ed. Vivian Taylor (Hildegard, 1995). The lyrics included in this song biography are from the newly released score. Louise Toppin, ed., *The Undine Smith Moore Collection: Art Songs, Spirituals, and Aria for Solo Voice* (Carl Fischer Publisher, 2026).

8. See Stephanie Shonekan, "One Life, Two Voices: The Exploration, Examination, and Exposition of the Life of Camilla Williams, Soprano" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2003); Camilla Williams and Stephanie Shonekan, *The Life of Camilla*

Williams: *African American Classical Singer and Opera Diva* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

9. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 161–65.

10. This manifested physically in the political support for slavery among white Americans and the wide participation of white people across the economic spectrum in slave patrols, which were often tied to local militias. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (Russell & Russell, 1935), 12–13; Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Harvard University Press, 2001); and Ben Brucato, *Race and Police: The Origin of Our Peculiar Institutions* (Rutgers University Press, 2023).

11. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 47, 158–66; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 36–42.

12. John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life and Sufferings of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England*, ed. Louise Alexis Chamberovzow (W. M. Watts, 1975), 113.

13. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 14–15.

14. Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: A Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853 from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River in Louisiana* (Sampson Low, Son & Company, 1853), 217.

15. Thomas Turino, “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (1999): 221–55.

16. For a general history of the Reconstruction era, the backlash to emancipation and reconstruction, and the subsequent establishment of Jim Crow laws and practices, see Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 1955); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (Oxford University Press, 1984); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, updated ed. (Harper-Collins, 2014); and Packard, *American Nightmare*.

17. Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Harvard University Press, 2021). See also James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

18. Woodson originated “Negro History Week,” which eventually became “Black History Month.” Woodson also founded the scholarly society the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History) and the *Journal of Negro History* (now the *Journal of African American History*). For a brief overview of Woodson’s work, see Pero Gago Dagbovie, “(Re)Introducing Foundational African American Historical Thought to a Twenty-First Century Readership,” *Journal of African American History* 102, no. 2 (2017): 232–53.

19. Hidden transcripts, as conceived by James C. Scott, refer to messages in everyday life that contain messages of resistance, usually hidden from outsiders. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990). For a discussion of hidden transcripts as a form of resistance in the Black community, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*.

20. Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask,” originally published in 1895; reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Dodd, Mead, 1922), 71.

21. See Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Stephen A. Berrey, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

22. A sample of civil rights protest songs of the 1960s can be found in *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs*, compiled with notes by Guy and Candie Carawan, Smithsonian Folkways SF 40032, 1990, compact disc, <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40032.pdf>. For more on music and resistance in the civil rights movement and Black Power era, see Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (University of California Press, 1998); Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (Routledge, 1999); Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2013); and Stephen Stacks, *The Resounding Revolution: Freedom Song After 1968* (University of Illinois Press, 2025).

23. Nina Simone, “Ain’t Got No—I Got Life,” written by Gerome Ragni, James Rado, and Galt MacDermot, track 8 on *’Nuff Said!*, RCA, 1968. This album was recorded at the Westbury Music Festival on Long Island, NY, on April 7, 1968, three days after the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; Simone’s performance included several homages to King.

24. For more on Simone’s music in the context of 1960s protest movements, see Tammy Kernodle, “‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free’: Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 3 (2008): 295–317.

25. “Black Is Beautiful: The Emergence of Black Culture and Identity in the 60s and 70s,” Stories, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Smithsonian Institution, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-beautiful-emergence-black-culture-and-identity-60s-and-70s>; “Say It Loud—I’m Black and I’m Proud,” by James Brown, written by James Brown, released as a single by King Records, 1968. For an overview of the Black Power movement, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ’til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (Henry Holt, 2006). For more on the Black Arts Movement and Black cultural production in this era, see Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*; and Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness*.

26. bell hooks, interview by Marlon Riggs, *Black Is . . . Black Ain’t* (California Newsreel, 1995), Alexander Street Press, 1:17:47–1:18:13, <https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/k200oZwo6>

27. Johnson, *Along This Way*, 155. For more on the history of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” including its role within the Black community and how it became the “Black national anthem,” see our song biography in chapter 1; and Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand*.

28. “What’s Going On,” by Marvin Gaye, track 1 on *What’s Going On*, written by Marvin Gaye, Al Cleveland, and Renaldo Benson, Tamla, 1971.

29. “Cops Use Shotguns—Bloody Street Fight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1969; Sam Whiting, “People’s Park at 50: A Recap of the Berkeley Struggle that Continues,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 2019.

30. Marvin Gaye, *What’s Going On*, Tamla TS310, 1971.

31. The football reference was no coincidence. Lem Barney and Mel Farr played football for the Detroit Lions and were fans of Gaye's music. Gaye invited them to the studio, and they both sang and spoke on the track. Additional backing vocals were provided by Gaye, Elgie Stover, Kenneth Stover, Bobby Rogers, and the Funk Brothers. Jerry Crowe, "Marvin Gaye Once Tried to Make It in NFL, with Help from Lem Barney, Mel Farr," *Los Angeles Times* (online), August 29, 2010, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-aug-29-la-sp-crowe-20100830-story.html>; Dan Holmes, "Two Members of the Detroit Lions Sang on One of the Greatest Songs of All-Time," *Vintage Detroit*, November 30, 2018, <https://www.vintagedetroit.com/marvin-gaye-whats-going-on-with-lem-barney-and-mel-farr/>; Dave Mesrey, "45 Years Later, Former Detroit Lion Lem Barney Remembers, 'What's Going On,'" *Detroit Metro Times*, May 17, 2016, <https://www.metrotimes.com/music/45-years-later-detroit-lion-lem-barney-remembers-whats-going-on-2444079>

32. For more on hip-hop in the post-1960s social and political context, see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (Picador, 2006); Murray Forman, Mark Anthony Neal, and Regina N. Bradley, eds., *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2023). For an overview of Black laborers and the Black working class in the United States, see Blair L. M. Kelley, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2023).

33. "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta," by Geto Boys, track 10 on *Uncut Dope: Geto Boys' Best*, Rap-A-Lot Records, 1992.

34. For more on the Geto Boys and hip-hop in Houston, see Ben Westhoff, *Dirty South: OutKast, Lil Wayne, Soulja Boy, and the Southern Rappers Who Reinvented Hip-Hop* (Chicago Review Press, 2011), 39–56; Charles L. Hughes, *Why Bushwick Bill Matters* (University of Texas Press, 2021); and Langston Collin Wilkins, *Welcome 2 Houston: Hip Hop Heritage in Hustle Town* (University of Illinois Press, 2023).

35. James C. Howell and John P. Moore, "History of Street Gangs in the United States," *National Gang Center Bulletin* 4 (May 2010), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-J26-PURL-gp01859/pdf/GOVPUB-J26-PURL-gp01859.pdf>

36. For an introduction to feminism and queerness within hip-hop music and culture, see Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* (Touchstone, 1999); and Lauron J. Kehrer, *Queer Voices in Hip Hop: Cultures, Communities, and Contemporary Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2023).

37. "Geto Boys—Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta (Official Video) [Explicit]," music video, posted September 30, 2011, by Uproxx, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IJCFc_qkHw

38. Nick Gass, "Cruz's New 'Office Space' Ad Hits Clinton," *Politico*, February 12, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/ted-cruz-office-space-ad-219205>; "It Feels Good to Be a Clinton," posted February 12, 2016, by Ted Cruz, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FECIYl03KRY>

39. "Long John Blues," by Dinah Washington, written by Tommy George, recorded 1949, released as a single by Mercury Records 8148, 1949.

40. See Hazel V. Carby, "In Body and Spirit: Representing Black Women Musicians," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 177–92; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*.

41. Robert Owens, “Die Nacht,” in *An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Songs*, ed. Louise Toppin and Scott Piper, Videmus African American Art Song Series (Classical Vocal Reprints, 2021).

42. Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Routledge, 1991).

43. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Letter from Birmingham Jail, Box 6623, Folder 4, University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, AL, <http://purl.lib.ua.edu/181702>. See also Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free*, 84–87.

44. *Nina Simone in Concert*, recorded March 21, April 1, and April 6, 1964, Phillips PHS 600–135, 1964.

45. These lyrics referring to Mississippi and Alabama might have been linked to the Evers assassination and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, respectively. When performing this song, Simone often replaced these state names with references to specific segregationist political figures or other states or localities where injustices were happening. The most obvious examples are her references to then-governor of Alabama “Lurleen Wallace” and “Memphis,” the site of Dr. King’s assassination, in her performance at the Westbury Music Fair in April 1968. See Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” track 12 on *Nuff Said* (Expanded Edition), in *Nina Simone: The Complete RCA Albums Collection*, RCA, 2011; “Mississippi Goddam (Live at Westbury Music Fair, Westbury, NY—April 1968),” posted May 24, 2015, by Nina Simone, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbSYOyh7QVw>

46. Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free,” 302.

47. See Jonathan Scott Holloway, *African American History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 57–63.

48. “Gotstobeadrag” (01053), *Safe Sex Shorts Series*, Gay Men’s Health Crisis, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection, New York Public Library. For more on the GMHC’s videos and electronic music during the AIDS crisis, see Destiny Meadows, “Negotiating Trauma through Music Video Creation during the United States HIV/AIDS Epidemic (1987–1995),” MA thesis (University of Miami, 2021); Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Duke University Press, 1995); Louis Niebur, *Menenergy: San Francisco’s Gay Disco Sound* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

49. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, “Original footage #2 [Gotstobeadrag]” (1990), New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed August 17, 2025. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/aee4e360-5642-0136-f640-571eb17b17c0>

50. Meadows, “Negotiating Trauma,” 34–38; Destiny Meadows, “Music Video Creation by Activists during the United States HIV/AIDS Epidemic (1987–1995),” presentation, Society for American Music Annual Meeting, Detroit, MI, March 10, 2023.

51. John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Harper & Row, 1988), 354–60.

52. “Homosexual Diseases Threaten American Families,” *Moral Majority Report*, July 1983, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.32207850>

53. Jon Cohen, “How HIV Took the World by Storm,” *Science.org*, October 29, 2007, <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-hiv-took-world-storm>; Linda G. Marc et al., “HIV among Haitian-Born Persons in the United States, 1985–2007,” *AIDS* 24, no. 13 (August 24, 2010): 2089–97.

54. Meadows, “Negotiating Trauma through Music Video Creation,” 38.
55. Meadows, “Negotiating Trauma through Music Video Creation,” 35. According to Meadows, who draws on an arts and culture web blog of Jan-Willem Geerinck (who cites an email exchange with Bruce Forest from July 24, 1998), this sample comes from a recording of Loleatta Holloway speaking midconcert in 1985. Holloway’s speech was recorded and edited by DJ Bruce Forest, copied by a friend, and given to Junior Vasquez. See “My Loleatta,” jahsonic.com, accessed August 16, 2025, <https://jahsonic.com/MyLoleatta.html>
56. Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Routledge, 2016).
57. Ennis B. Edmonds, “Dread ‘I’ In-a Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Adrian Anthony McFarlane, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, and William David Spencer (Temple University Press, 1998), 23–35.
58. Stephen King, “Rocksteady, the Rude Boy, and the Political Awakening of Rastafari,” in *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control* (University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 26–44.
59. Noriko Manabe, “We Gon’ Be Alright? The Ambiguities of Kendrick Lamar’s Protest Anthem,” *Music Theory Online* 25, no. 1 (2019), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.manabe.html>

Chapter 4

1. “Fire in the Mountain Blues / Trouble in Mind Blues,” by Thelma La Vizzo, written by Richard M. Jones, released as a single by Paramount, 12206, 1924.
2. “Trouble in Mind (9510),” by Bertha “Chippie” Hill, written by Richard M. Jones, track 4 on *Bertha “Chippie” Hill: Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, 1925–1929*, Document Records DOCD-5330, 1995. Lyrics transcribed from this recording.
3. “Trouble in Mind” is referenced in Langston Hughes’s work. Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1–2. “Trouble in Mind” was also taken as the title of a history of the Black experience during Jim Crow; see Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (Knopf, 1998).
4. Colin Larkin, “Jones Richard M.,” in *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2006), accessed August 7, 2025, <https://www.oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/display/10.1093/acref/9780195313734.001.0001/acref-9780195313734-e-38123>; “Richard M. Jones,” *Discography of American Historical Recording*, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/names/324036>
5. It is unclear whether these lyrics refer to the train number (“219”) or the train’s time of departure (“2:19”); this ambiguity is also present in another blues song, Jelly Roll Morton’s “Mamie’s Blues,” also often called the “219 Blues.” See Elijah Wald, “Mamie’s Blues (219 Blues),” *Old Friends: A Songobiography*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.elijahwald.com/songblog/mamies-blues/>
6. In addition to the usual risks of farming, landowners often cheated sharecroppers out of their share of the profits. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 131–36.
7. For more on the great migration, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chi-*

cago, *Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2010).

8. The importation of slaves became illegal in 1808, but that did not eliminate such trafficking. See, for example, Sylviane A. Diouf, *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America* (Oxford University Press, 2007). For more on the illicit transatlantic slave trade, see Warren S. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837–1862* (University of California Press, 1963). Also see Adam Rothman, “The Domestication of the Slave Trade in the United States,” and Steven Deyle, “The Domestic Slave Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the Southern Slave System,” in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (Yale University Press, 2005), 32–54, 91–116.

9. Michael Gomez notes that by 1830, North American-born enslaved people well outnumbered those born in Africa, contributing to the rise of a discernible African American “sociocultural matrix.” Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 12.

10. For more on the history of religion in the Black community, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd ed. (Orbis Books, 1998); and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004).

11. Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York University Press, 2008).

12. J. Roland Braithwaite, introduction to Richard Allen, *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from Various Authors*, ed. J. Roland Braithwaite (T. L. Plowman, 1987), xiv–xv; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 85–88.

13. Allen, *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, “Hymn 1” (“The voice of Free Grace . . .”): 4–7, “Hymn 1” (“From regions of Love . . .”): 82–86. This publication includes facsimile reproductions of these hymns from Allen's 1801 hymnal.

14. Brenda Ellis, “Slave Music of the South,” in *Encyclopedia of African American Music*, vol. 3, 878–83; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 82–89.

15. The text for this hymn is attributed to William Arthur Dunkerley under the pseudonym John Oxenham. As with many hymns, several existing tunes were associated with this text. One of the most popular tunes, thought to be Irish, is called “MCKEE.” Harry T. Burleigh's arrangement of this tune with the lyrics to “In Christ There Is No East or West” from 1939 continues to be performed widely. See “In Christ There Is No East or West,” written by John Oxenham, arranged by Harry T. Burleigh, in *The Hymnal 1982: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (Church Hymnal Corp., 1982), 529, Hymnary.org, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://hymnary.org/hymn/EH1982/529>. Hymnary.org includes full scans for this hymn as it appears (with Burleigh's arrangement of “MCKEE”) in several other hymnals, demonstrating the hymn's appeal across racial and religious boundaries. In addition to its inclusion in *The Hymnal 1982*, created for the predominately white Episcopal Church, it also appears in hymnals created for the African Methodist Episcopal Church (a predominately Black church); see Robert O. Hoffelt, ed., *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal* (AME Church, 2011), 557. For

more on racial and ethnic demographics and religion, see Pew Research Center, February 2025, “Decline of Christianity in the US Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off,” 95, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2025/02/PR_2025.02.26_religious-landscape-study_report.pdf

16. For more on grassroots organizing in the movement, see Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1995).

17. MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, December 5, 1955, Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, sourced to MLKJP, GAMK, Martin Luther King Jr. Papers (Series I–IV), Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, GA, T-18, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church>

18. For additional context on organized resistance in transportation, see Robin D. G. Kelley, “Congested Terrain: Resistance on Public Transportation,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Free Press, 1996), 55–76; Kelley, *Right to Ride*.

19. See chapter 3 for a lengthier discussion of Black American education during the Jim Crow era. For more on beauty shops as a critical space in the Black community, see Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (University of Illinois Press, 2010).

20. Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

21. Horace Clarence Boyer, “Charles Albert Tindley: Progenitor of Black-American Gospel Music,” *Black Perspective in Music* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1983): 103–32; Stacks, *The Resounding Revolution*, 207, 319n113.

22. Lyrics from the liner notes to “We Shall Overcome,” by the Montgomery Gospel Trio, the Nashville Quartet, and Guy Carawan, track 12 on *We Shall Overcome: Songs of the “Freedom Riders” and the “Sit-Ins,”* Smithsonian Folkways FH 5591, 1961, LP, <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/FW05591.pdf>

23. Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York University Press, 2013), 141–78.

24. Activist and singer Jamila Jones recounts a demonstration in which protesters singing “we are not afraid” rattled a police officer so much that he asked them if they could sing less loudly. As Jones explains, “these people had all the guns, the billy clubs, the power, . . . and he was asking me, with a shake, if I would not sing so loud. And it was that time that I really understood the power of our . . . music.” Jamila Jones, interview by Joseph Mosnier, April 27, 2011, Atlanta, Georgia, US Civil Rights History Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 32:30–36:05 <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669108/>

25. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 473.

26. Lyrics transcribed from Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, eds., *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 397.

27. Horace Clarence Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel* (Elliot & Clark, 1995), 49–51; Robert Darden, “Gospel Music in the African American Community,” in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., Charles Hiroshi Garrett (Ox-

ford University Press, 2013), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195314281.001.0001/acref-9780195314281-e-3313>; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 475–87.

28. Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 61.

29. Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 62.

30. Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 61.

31. Thomas A. Dorsey, interviewed in George T. Nierenberg, director, *Say Amen, Somebody* (Kino Lorber, 1982), 16:02–17:41, Kanopy, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/umich/video/11831385>

32. Raka Nandi, “Ben Branch,” *National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel*, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://civilrightsmuseum.org/ben-branch/>; Kevin Nance, “At the Scene of a Tragedy, National Civil Rights Museum Preserves History,” *Washington Post*, August 20, 2011; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years* (Simon & Schuster, 2006), 766.

33. “Throng Honors Marian Anderson in Concert at Lincoln Memorial,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1939.

34. A recording from the NBC radio broadcast of Anderson’s concert can be heard on Marian Anderson, *Let Freedom Ring!*, JSP Records JSP683, 2016, compact disc and MP3 audio; “My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord” does not appear in this source. A recording of Anderson singing the song can be heard on track 24 of *Marian Anderson—Spirituals*, reissued, BMG 09026-63306-2, 1999, compact disc and MP3 audio. See also Cary O’Dell, “NBC Radio Coverage of Marian Anderson’s Recital at the Lincoln Memorial (April 9, 1939),” Library of Congress, added to the National Registry, 2008, <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/MarianAndersonLincolnMem.pdf>

35. Lyrics transcribed from “Trampin’,” track 8 on Anderson, *Let Freedom Ring!*

36. Protests included an organized boycott and marches against employment discrimination in Harlem in the early 1930s and an NAACP-led campaign to pass anti-lynching legislation. On Black protest in 1930s Harlem, see Cheryl Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

37. See Philip Ewell, *On Music Theory and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* (University of Michigan Press, 2023), 47–88.

38. We explore Blackness and the classical music canon as a teaching tool in chapter 5. For representative examples of the neglect of Black classical music in classical (or Western) music history textbooks, see Joseph Kerman and Gary Tomlinson, *Listen*, 8th ed. (Bedford/St. Martins, 2015) and J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 10th ed. (W. W. Norton, 2019) and its companion volume of musical scores, Burkholder and Palisca, *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, 8th ed., 3 vols. (W. W. Norton, 2019). These volumes include only one work by a Black classical composer, a movement from William Grant Still’s *Afro-American Symphony*. The 8th ed. of *Listen* (2015) and the 4th ed. of the *Norton Anthology* (2001) were the first in their respective series to include Still’s piece. For more on whiteness and classical music pedagogy in the United States, see Ewell, *On Music Theory*, 66–79.

39. For example, see Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (W. W. Norton, 1983); and Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (W. W. Norton, 2001). Hamm’s volume neglects classical music by Black composers and performers, and

Crawford's book makes only passing mentions of three composers, Florence Price, William Grant Still, and William Levi Dawson (pp. 661–62).

40. Despite some recent shifts, these practices formed the core of training that the musicians on our author team received over the past five decades.

41. For a general history of Black classical music and Black music scholarship and criticism during this period, including discussions of these figures, see Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1943* (University Press of Mississippi, 2012).

42. Samantha Ege, *South Side Impresarios: How Race Women Transformed Chicago's Classical Music Scene* (University of Illinois Press, 2024); Lucy Caplan, *Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera* (Harvard University Press, 2025).

43. For more about “shadow cultures,” see Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (University of Illinois Press, 2018); and Naomi André and Denise Von Glahn, “Shadow Culture Narratives: Race, Gender, and American Music Historiography,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 709–82.

44. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 26–29.

45. For more on Black participation in horn playing, see Katy Ambrose, “Unlocking the Past: William Lee and the Rodenbostel Horn at Mount Vernon,” *The Horn Call: Journal of the International Horn Society* 51, no. 2 (February 2021): 49–52; and “The Horn Call Podcast Episode 10: Katy Ambrose,” posted May 26, 2021, by International Horn Society, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQXLzGfuRNg>

46. For more on the African roots of the violin, see Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, *Fiddling in West Africa: Touching the Spirit in Fulbe, Hausa, and Dagbama Cultures* (Indiana University Press, 2008).

47. For more information about Edmond Dédé and the 2025 premiere of *Morgiane*, see the biography by Sally McKee, *The Exile's Song: Edmond Dédé and the Unfinished Revolutions of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017); Keith O'Brien, “Found: A Manuscript That Unlocks a Forgotten Black Composer's World,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2025; and Candace Bailey, “First Draft: Staging Race in Edmond Dédé's ‘Morgiane,’” Historic New Orleans Collection, January 15, 2025, <https://hnoc.org/publishing/first-draft/staging-race-in-edmond-dedes-morgiane>. Also see Candace Bailey's forthcoming book about Dédé's *Morgiane* (Cambridge University Press).

48. See Kira Thurman, “Wagnerian Dreams, Grandiose Visions: Lawrence Freeman's Voodoo at the Miller Theater at Columbia University,” *Opera Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 226–32; David Gutkin, “The Modernities of H. Lawrence Freeman,” 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 719–79; and Austin Stewart, “The Opera Is Booming. This Is a City Opera in the Urban Frontier of Denver, 1864–1893” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2019), 222–75.

49. The finding aid for the H. Lawrence Freeman papers is available online: H. Lawrence Freeman, Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/pdf/cul-6381639.pdf>

50. Voodoo belongs to a family of African diasporic religions with different names and practices. West African Vodun, Haitian Vodou, Candomblé Jeje (also known as Brazilian Vodun), and Cuban Santería are just a few of the many syncretic practices among Black communities in the Americas.

51. Ann Sears, “Political Currents and Black Culture in Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha*,” in *Blackness in Opera*, ed. Naomi André, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor (University of Illinois Press 2012), 101–15.

52. Scott Joplin, “No. 18: Aunt Dinah Has Blowed De Horn,” in *Treemonisha: Opera in Three Acts* (Scott Joplin, 1911), 142–47, accessed August 5, 2025, https://ks15.imsllp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/1/1c/IMSLP191737-PMLP30496-SJoplin_Treemonisha.pdf

53. Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 26.

54. Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry*, 38.

55. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 227–31, quotation on 228.

56. Will Marion Cook, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, ed. Thomas L. Riis (A-R Editions, 1996).

57. Kristen M. Turner, “Class, Race, and Uplift in the Opera House: Theodore Drury and His Company Cross the Color Line,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 34, no. 4 (2015): 320–51. See also Karen M. Bryan, “Radiating a Hope: Mary Cardwell Dawson as Educator and Activist,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 25, no. 1 (October 2003): 20–35.

58. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

59. Jean Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), 270.

60. A ninth opera of Still’s was a reworking of “A Southern Interlude.”

61. This essay is adapted from Naomi André, “What Do We Do with Dreams? Thoughts After Seeing a Performance of William Grant Still’s *Highway 1, USA* at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis,” *Black Opera Research Network (BORN) Forum*, July 7, 2021, <https://www.blackoperaresearch.net/forum/2021/07/07/what-do-we-do-with-dreams-thoughts-after-seeing-a-performance-of-william-grant-stills-highway-1-usa-at-the-opera-theatre-of-st-louis/>

62. Langston Hughes, “Dreams” and “Dream Variations,” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 32, 40.

63. Hughes, “Montage of a Dream Deferred: Harlem [2]” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 426.

64. Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (Grand Central, 2001), 85–87.

65. The libretto for this opera can be found in the liner notes to *William Grant Still’s Highway One, USA*, Louise Toppin, Robert Honeysucker, Ray M. Wade Jr., Pamela Dillard, Philip Brunnelle, St. Olaf Orchestra, Vocal Essence, Visionary Records VIS734, 2005, NAXOS Music Library, <https://umich-naxosmusiclibrary-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/catalogue/item.asp?cid=TROY734>

66. *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Philadelphia Orchestra, Deutsche Grammophon, 2023; *Blanchard: Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Met Live in HD DVD)*, Will Liverman, Latonia Moore, Angel Blue, The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Chorus, and Ballet, Yannick Nézet-Séguin (Metropolitan Opera, 2022). *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3* was awarded the Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance in 2022. The Met’s recording of *Fire* was awarded the Grammy for Best Opera Recording in 2023.

67. Julia J. Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan’ in Mid-Nineteenth Century America: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s Early Life and Debut Concert Tour,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 125–65; Chybowski, “Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s Mid-to-Late Career, Philanthropy, and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Music* 40, no. 2 (2022): 211–44.

68. Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Cornell University Press, 2021). See also Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

69. Despite her training as a classical pianist, the Curtis Institute of Music rejected Simone as a student, something she “assumed was based on her race.” Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free*, 33, 211n31. Feldstein cites Nina Simone with Steven Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (Da Capo Press, 1993), 42, and Nadine Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (Pantheon, 2010), 5–60. Readers may be familiar with the Academy-Award-winning film *Green Book*, directed by Peter Farrelly (Universal, 2018), a fictionalized story following Don Shirley on tour.

70. “Art Davis, 73; Known for Mastery of the Bass, also Was a Psychologist,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 2007. Davis filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of the City of New York. See Human Rights Commission: Official Complaints of Davis and Madison, 7 Jan 1969–8 May 1969, Folder 679-01-10, Executive Records, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives, [71. Rachel Swatman, “Ron Carter Earns World Record as the Most Recorded Jazz Bassist in History,” *Guinness World Records*, January 7, 2016, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2016/1/ron-carter-earns-world-record-as-the-most-recorded-jazz-bassist-in-history-411828>](https://archives.nyphil.org/index.php/artifact/80297654-8666-45c4-9d68-457e24eeaf8-0.1; Volume IV: Human Rights Commission Hearings, Testimony of Rosen, Davis, Jones, Porter, Dietrich, Smyles, Dixon, and Miller, 25 Sep 1969–25 Sep 1969, Folder 679-01-04, Executive Records, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives, https://archives.nyphil.org/index.php/artifact/c30091db-2b8b-44c9-8e0a-75e53625f57e-0.1, see pp. 438–526 for Davis’s testimony.</p>
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72. Marcus J. Moore, “At 85, the Jazz Bassist Ron Carter Still Seeks ‘A Better Order of Notes,’” *New York Times*, May 9, 2022.

73. Peter Schnall, *Ron Carter: Finding the Right Notes* (Partisan Pictures, 2022), <https://www.roncartermovie.com/>, available through PBS, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/show/ron-carter-finding-right-notes/>

74. Morrison, *Blacksound*.

75. Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (W. W. Norton, 1979), 118–23.

76. On the origins and nineteenth-century manifestations of blackface minstrelsy, see Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1974); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*; Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Brian Roberts, *Blackface Nation: Race, Reform, and Identity in American Popular Music, 1812–1925* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

77. David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 4th ed. (Verso, 2022), 158–84; Lott, *Love and Theft*, 96–100, 153–54.

78. See Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 142–57; Lott, *Love and Theft*; Michael Rogin charts similar themes through Jewish involvement in blackface in twentieth-century film in Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (University of California Press, 1996).

79. See Sam Dennison, *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music* (Garland, 1982); Stephanie Dunson, “Black Misrepresentation in Nineteenth Century Sheet Music Illustration,” in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890–1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 45–65.

80. Matthew D. Morrison, “Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 781–823.

81. Some scholars believe that “Dixie” was first written and performed by the Snowdens, an African American family who were musicians and residents in Mount Vernon, Ohio, where Emmett also lived. According to this interpretation, Emmett may have heard their song and then claimed it as his own. See Howard L. Sacks and Judith Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family’s Claim to the Confederate Anthem* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

82. Stephen Foster [falsely credited as “written and composed by E. P. Christy”], *Old Folks at Home: Ethiopian Melody* (Firth, Pond & Co., 1851), Historic American Sheet Music Collection, Digital Collections, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4xdow88s>

83. For a discussion of Black performers in the context of blackface minstrelsy, see Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop* (W. W. Norton, 2012).

84. For more on Black women performers from the 1890s until the 1940s, see Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Duke University Press, 2008).

85. See Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”: Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2006).

86. “Nobody,” by Bert Williams and Arthur Collins with orchestra, released as a single by Victor 4391, 1905, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021617750/>. Lyrics transcribed from the recording.

87. Quoted in Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Duke University Press, 2006), 223. See also Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky,”* 17–45.

88. This inscription appears in many, if not all, of Burleigh’s spiritual arrangements for solo voice and piano. For example, see Burleigh, *Negro Spirituals: Oh Peter Go Ring Dem Bells* (G. Ricordi, 1918), Temple University, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll1/id/5380>

89. Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Duke University Press, 2018), 70.

90. Unsigned review of “The Black Swan’s Concert,” *The New York Herald*, April 1, 1853; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 71. Eidsheim—citing Vera Brodsky Lawrence and George Templeton Strong—dates this concert and review to April 1, 1854. Lawrence and Strong, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

91. Jean E. Snyder, "A Great and Noble School of Music: Dvořák, Harry T. Burleigh, and the African American Spiritual," in *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Amadeus Press, 1993), 131.

92. Marva Griffin Carter, *Swing Along: The Musical Life of Will Marion Cook* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 57. Also see Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 207–80.

93. *Daily News* (New York), May 16, 1903, quoted in Carter, *Swing Along*, 62.

94. "DAHOMY ON BROADWAY," *New York Times*, February 19, 1903.

95. Jayna Brown notes that "Black performers were not 'minstrels' in the same sense as were whites in blackface, for there was the formation of and recognition of diasporic kinships." Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 185.

96. Carter, *Swing Along*, 42.

97. Carter, *Swing Along*, 61.

98. Lyrics from Carter, *Swing Along*, 61.

99. "Correspondence," Will Mercer Cook Papers, Box 157–2, Folder 10, Howard University, Washington, DC; quoted in Carter, *Swing Along*, 61.

100. D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (Epoch Producing, 1915).

101. See Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (Free Press, 1991); M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (University Press of Virginia, 1998); and Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Duke University Press, 2015).

102. Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, *Steamboat Willie* (Disney Animation Studios, 1928).

103. Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," 782.

104. Lyrics adapted from those found in Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 98–99.

105. For a sample image of the Gold Dust twins, see the advertisement for Fairbanks Gold Dust washing powder in *Home and Flowers* 11, no. 1 (November 1901): 18, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433007707486?urlappend=%3Bseq=24%3Bowne&id=27021597769384767-28>

106. Angela Davis describes many of the early blues songs by Black women as "quotidian expressions of feminist consciousness" (p. 18). For a rich discussion of early Black women blues singers, see Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*.

107. "Why I Sing the Blues," by B. B. King, written by King and Dave Clark, track 10 on *Live & Well*, BluesWay / ABC Records BLS-6031-B, 1969. Lyrics transcribed from the recording.

108. *Hidden Heritage: The Roots of Black American Painting*, directed by Andrew Pinnington (Cue Productions, 1991), 47:21–47:35, <https://driskellcenter.umd.edu/media/1990s-hidden-heritage-roots-black-american-painting>

109. Archibald Motley Jr., interview by Dennis Barrie, January 23, 1978, and March 1, 1979, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-archibald-motley-11466>

110. On amateur minstrel shows in the 1920s and 1930s, see Susan Smulyan, "Minstrel Laughs: Popular Culture, Race, and the Middle Class," in *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Kevin Byrne, "The Circulation of Blackface: Nostalgia and Tradition in US Minstrel Performance of the Early 1920s," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 108, no. 2 (2014): 217–37.

The primary sources related to this paragraph are in the possession of Singing Justice Collective member Stephen Berrey.

111. As it became the state song in 1940, in the title and lyrics “Virginny” was replaced with “Virginia.” These new lyrics did not replace the racially derogatory term “darky.” The official state songs of Florida (“Old Folks at Home”) and Kentucky (“My Old Kentucky Home”) both have roots in blackface minstrelsy, too.

112. For more on James Bland, see Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 234–37; Roberts, *Blackface Nation*, 272–74; and Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 52–56.

113. Wilder had been publicly calling for replacing the tune as the state song since his election to the Virginia State Senate in 1970. “Virginia Moves to Sweeten State Song by Replacing Bitter Words,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 1994.

114. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 236; Roberts, *Blackface Nation*, 273.

115. Dunson, “Black Misrepresentation in Nineteenth-Century Sheet Music Illustration,” 55–56.

116. William R. Hullfish, “James A. Bland: Pioneer Black Songwriter,” *Black Music Research Journal* 7 (1987): 1–33.

117. “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” Side B, track 3, on *The Genius Hits the Road*, by Ray Charles featuring the Raelettes, ABC-Paramount 335, 1960.

118. “Gov. Ralph Northam Admits He Was in 1984 Yearbook Photo Showing Figures in Blackface, KKK Hood,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2019; Alan Blinder and Jonathan Martin, “Governor Admits He Was in Racist Yearbook Photo,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2019; Alan Blinder, “Was That Ralph Northam in Blackface? An Inquiry Ends Without Answers,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2019.

119. “Gov. Ralph Northam Admits He Was in 1984 Yearbook Photo.”

120. Frederick Douglass, *The North Star* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 27, 1848, quoted in Lott, *Love and Theft*, 15.

121. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 271.

122. Ely, *The Adventures of Amos ‘n’ Andy*, 160–93, 215–16.

123. James W. Loewen, “Black Image in White Vermont: The Origin, Meaning, and Abolition of Kake Walk,” in *The University of Vermont: The First Two Hundred Years*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (University Press of New England, 1991).

124. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*.

125. Toll, *Blackening Up*.

126. Lott, *Love and Theft*.

127. Two exceptions, works written about amateur minstrel shows, are Smulyan, *Popular Ideologies*, chapter 1, and Charles Hamm, “The Last Minstrel Show?,” in *Putting Popular Music in Its Place* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). A forthcoming book by Rhae Lynn Barnes, *Darkology: Blackface and the American Way of Entertainment* (Liveright, 2026), is expected to include a lengthy discussion of amateur blackface minstrelsy of the twentieth century.

128. Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (Universal Pictures, 1990).

129. “Fight the Power,” by Public Enemy, track 20 on *Fear of a Black Planet*, Def Jam, 1990. Lyrics transcribed from the recording.

130. “Alright” by Kendrick Lamar, track 7 on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015. Lyrics transcribed from the recording.

131. Our Native Daughters includes four Black female banjo players: Giddens, Amythyst Kiah, Leyla McCalla, and Allison Russell; see *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, African American Legacy Recordings, Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40232, 2019.

132. “1797, Advertisement for the Sale of a Slave” (original published in *Rising Sun*), New Paltz Town Records, housed at Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, NY, digitized at New York Heritage Digital Collections, published 2007, accessed August 17, 2025, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/nptr/id/268/rec/11>

133. Rhiannon Giddens (@rhiannongiddens). “Every time I pick up my banjo (made by Jim Hartel) I feel a lick or tune wanting to escape into the world. This is one of hundreds that come and go. I play this banjo, a replica of a banjo style from 1858, because it feels deeply cultural and spiritual to me.” March 29, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5GlkiqOyXu/>

Chapter 5

1. For more on the emergence and development of gospel music from its emergence through the twentieth century, see Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 456–65, 475–87; Bernice Johnson Reagon, ed., *We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*; Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 125–48; Mellonee V. Burnim, “Crossing Musical Borders: Agency and Process in the Gospel Music Industry” and “Voices of Women in Gospel Music: Resisting Representations,” in *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*, ed. Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonee V. Burnim (Routledge, 2017); and Braxton D. Shelley, *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2021). See chapter 4 of this book for a lengthier discussion of music in the Black church.

2. “Get Right Church,” by James Cleveland and the Voices of Tabernacle, track 6 on *Great Gospel Choirs*, compilation album, Roadshow Records, 1965; and track 9 on *Rev. James Cleveland—The Platinum Gospel Collection*, compilation album, remastered, Sonorous Entertainment SON-CD-701, 2011.

3. “If You Believe in God,” by Mattie Moss Clark with the Michigan State Community Choir, track 2 on *I Am Crucified with Christ*, Sound of Gospel Records SOG 084, 1978.

4. “More Abundant Medley (Live),” by Ricky Dillard, track 2 on *Choirmaster*, Motown Gospel / Capitol CMG, 2020.

5. (Johann) Amadeus Wendt, *Ueber den gegenwärtigen Zustand der Musik besonders in Deutschland und wie er geworden* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1836), 3. See also Burkholder et al., *A History of Western Music*, 462–64. Wendt refers to a “classische Period,” or “classical period,” not explicitly to “classical music.” Leon Plantinga notes that for Wendt the music of this classical period was almost exclusively the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (W. W. Norton, 1984), 21.

6. For a prototypical discussion of the musical style, see Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (W. W. Norton, 1971).

7. See Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (University of California Press, 2010), 48–71.

8. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 83–168; Richard Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape: The Business of Musicianship from Billings to Gershwin* (University of California Press, 1993), 3–37.

9. For an example of the classical music canon, as it is still most widely used and taught in introductory music history courses at American universities, see Burkholder and Palisca, *Norton Anthology of Western Music*.

10. Ewell, *On Music Theory*, 47–88, quotation on p. 58.

11. Olly Wilson, “Black Music as an Art Form,” *Black Music Research Journal* 3 (1983): 21.

12. Traci L. Lombré and Louise Toppin, script for the radio show *Conversations in African American Music*, created by Louise Toppin and producer Brad Cresswell, WGTE, Toledo, Ohio, 2023; Traci L. Lombré, “The Harlem Renaissance Ain’t About Harlem: Recovering Kansas Communities in the Emergence of Black American Expressive Culture, from Slave Narratives to Bebop,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2024).

13. Thurman, *Singing Like Germans*, 150.

14. Morrison, “Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse,” 794. Morrison is paraphrasing Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 641–71.

15. Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 44.

16. Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 46.

17. Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 51.

18. “Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes,” by George Jones, written by Troy Seals and Max D. Barnes, track 1 on *Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes*, Epic Records, 1985; “George Jones—Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes (Official Video),” music video, posted August 19, 2019, by GeorgeJonesOfficial, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/vxHjRqnY7zA?si=jXrHoklleGsoCpQo>. Lyrics adapted from the music video’s captions.

19. Bailey was a founding member of the Grand Ole Opry. Pride and Rucker were inducted in 1993 and 2012, respectively. For a list of current members, see “Opry Members,” Opry.com, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.opry.com/about/membership/>. For the Country Music Hall of Fame, the induction dates are as follows: Pride (2000), Bailey (2005), and Charles (2021). See “Hall of Fame Members,” Country Music Hall of Fame, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.countrymusichalloffame.org/hall-of-fame>.

20. Alice Randall, *My Black Country: A Journey Through Country Music’s Black Past, Present, and Future* (Black Privilege Publishing/Atria, 2024).

21. For more on the Black presence in country music, see Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites, and Blues* (November Books, 1970); Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (University of Tennessee Press, 1995); Pamela E. Foster, *My Country, Too: The Other Black Music* (My Country, 2000); Miller, *Segregating Sound*; Diane Pecknold, ed., *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Duke University Press, 2013); Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Stephanie Shonekan, *Soul, Country, and the USA: Race and Identity in American Music Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Tina L. Steptoe, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (University of California Press, 2016), 155–222; Francesca Royster, *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions* (University of Texas Press, 2022); and Rissi Palmer, “Black at the Roots: A Lesson on Country Music’s Lineage,” *Oxford American* 119 (Winter 2022): 170.

22. Joe Levy, “Inside the ‘Old Town Road’ Charts Decision,” *Billboard.com*, September 19, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/inside-the-old-town-road-charts-decision/>; Randall Roberts, “Conservative Country Music Fans Lash out at CMA Performance by Beyoncé and the Dixie Chicks,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 2016; Chris Molanphy, *Old Town Road* (Duke University Press, 2023); Taylor Crumpton, “Beyoncé Has Always Been Country,” *Time*, February 14, 2024; Alaina Demopoulos, “Beyoncé’s Act II Album Cover Is ‘A Clapback to Being Told She Doesn’t Belong in Country Music,’” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2024.

23. Rhiannon Giddens, “Black Artistry Is Woven Into the Fabric of Country Music. It Belongs to Everyone,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2024; Tressie McMillan Cottom, “Country Music Is Entirely at War with Itself,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2025.

24. See, for example, Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 73–78; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 332–38; Crawford, *America’s Musical Life*, 557–63; and Albert Murray, “Blues Music as Such,” in *Stomping the Blues*, 40th anniversary ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

25. Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 12.

26. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 32–48.

27. For more on the history of blackface minstrelsy, see chapter 4.

28. Crawford, *America’s Musical Life*, 107–17; Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music/American Music* (University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 5–6; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 71–89, 452–56; and Portia K. Maultsby, “Folk Spiritual,” Timeline of African American Music, Carnegie Hall, <https://timeline.carnegiehall.org/genres/folk-spiritual>. These sources describe frequent cross-pollination between the songs and music made by white Christians and Black Christians in formal church services and camp revivals. See also the discussion of Harry T. Burleigh’s hymn “In Christ There Is No East or West,” a hymn with wide publication in hymnals for white and Black congregations, in chapter 4.

29. See Miller, *Segregating Sound*. As Randall notes, given the many silences in the archives related to Black musicians, it is impossible to identify when and where these musical forms began; Randall, *My Black Country*, 8.

30. Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 198.

31. See Miller, *Segregating Sound*.

32. Samuel Parler, “DeFord Bailey in Country Music’s Multiracial Canon,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 73, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 78–87.

33. Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, “‘Choo Choo Ch’ Boogie’: The Prehistory of Rock ‘n’ Roll, 1945–1955,” in *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

34. For more information about “Hound Dog,” see the song biography in chapter 6.

35. Hughes, *Country Soul*, 134. Also see David Cantwell, “What Country Music Owes to Charley Pride,” *New Yorker*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/what-country-music-owes-to-charley-pride>

36. Randall, *My Black Country*, 15.

37. Randall, *My Black Country*, 158.

38. Parler, “DeFord Bailey in Country Music’s Multiracial Canon,” 71.

39. An important moment for recognizing and celebrating these past and present Black influences in country and related styles came with the 2025 “Biscuits and Banjos Festival” in Durham, North Carolina. Organized by Rhiannon Giddens, the festival traced “the musical and geographical connections of old time, country, Americana, folk, jazz and blues to highlight their complicated origins.” It also commemorated the 2005 Black Banjo Gathering held in Boone, North Carolina. See Biscuits & Banjos, <https://www.biscuitsandbanjos.com/>, accessed May 1, 2025; Jonathan Abrams, “They Came to See a Band Reunion. And Eat Biscuits,” *New York Times*, May 9, 2025.

40. On the influence of Hawaiian musicians and the Hawaiian steel guitar on country, blues, and modern music more broadly, see John W. Troutman, *Kīkā Kilā: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

41. Jack Moran and Glenn Douglas Tubb (the nephew of country music star Ernest Tubb) wrote the song.

42. “YA YA,” by Beyoncé, written by Beyoncé, Terius “The-Dream” Gesteelde-Diamant, S. Carter, Oliver Rodigan, Harry Edwards, Klara Mkhatshwa Munk-Hansen, Anaïs Marinho, Lee Hazlewood, Brian Wilson, and Mike Love, track 20 on *Cowboy Carter*, Parkwood Entertainment / Columbia Records, 2023. Lyrics adapted from those posted at “YA YA,” Lyrics, act ii COWBOY CARTER, <https://music.beyonce.com/>. “Fannie Mae” refers to the Federal National Mortgage Association, a US-government-backed corporation specializing in mortgages and mortgage-backed securities.

Chapter 6

1. The inspiration for using group discussions as a tool for reflection came from a concert of African American music by the Experiential Orchestra in New York City in which the non-African American conductor James Blachly asked members of the audience to turn and talk about their impressions of the music with a neighbor. The *Black Music and the Soul of America* project created the Black Music Lab through Duke Humanities funding (Fall 2021–April 2023) and was organized by Professors Thomas Brothers and Anthony Kelley; <https://humanitiesunbounded.duke.edu/humanities-labs/black-music>

2. Anthony Kelley, postrecital discussion with Louise Toppin, October 22, 2022, Nelson Music Room, Duke University, Durham, NC.

3. In this chapter we use the word “dialect” to refer to the different versions of Black English that song literature (spirituals, Blues, and other repertory) uses throughout time. Terms such as “African American Vernacular English” and “Ebonics,” among others, do not capture the fluid nature of the varied written representations of Black speech across multiple locations (throughout the United States, Caribbean, and more) and over time.

4. *The Chancel Choir of First Christian Church, Falls Church, Virginia Presents a Concert of Black Spirituals*, 1982, LP.

5. For more on the history of this song, see Margolick, *Strange Fruit*.

6. Autumn Huerter, “How Music and Culture Work Together: Science Behind Music,” Music House: School of Music, September 28, 2020, <https://www.musichouseschool.com/how-music-and-culture-work-together-science-behind-music>

7. See the discussion of commodification and appropriation in the section on blackface minstrelsy in chapter 4.

Chapter 7

1. For additional detailed advice on using music to teach about the civil rights movement, see Charles L. Hughes, “Freedom Songs: Building a Civil Rights Playlist,” in *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Hasan Kwame Jeffries (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 209–23.

2. On the role of music in the Black Lives Matter movement, see Fernando Orejuela and Stephanie Shonekan, eds., *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection* (Indiana University Press, 2018).

3. Our use of the term “hard history” builds on an initiative from the Southern Poverty Law Center that included a podcast series. See Kate Shuster et al. “Teaching Hard History” (SPLC January 31, 2016), <https://www.splcenter.org/20180131/teaching-hard-history>; and see Hasan Kwame Jeffries, host, *Teaching Hard History*, podcast, Learning for Justice, Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcasts/teaching-hard-history>

4. The Singing Down the Barriers project was initiated in 2004 as a collaboration between music professor Emery Stephens (now at St. Olaf College) and Singing Justice member Caroline Helton. The two-week summer institute began in 2020, and along with Helton and Stephens, its core faculty includes Singing Justice members Louise Toppin (director) and Christie Finn.

5. Margaret Bonds, “Minstrel Man,” in *More Margaret Bonds—Three Dream Portraits (High Key) and Three Original Songs*, ed. Louise Toppin, Videmus African American Art Song Series (Classical Vocal Reprints, 2023).

6. Student response following a seminar recital, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2022.

7. For more on Bonds, see Eileen Southern, *A Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Greenwood, 1982); Mildred Denby Green, *Black Women Composers: A Genesis* (Twayne, 1983); Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies*, 141–88; Ege, *South Side Impresarios*; and John Michael Cooper, *Margaret Bonds* (Oxford University Press, 2025).

8. See André, *Black Opera*; and André and Von Glahn, “Shadow Culture Narratives.”

9. Entry from May 17, John Adams Diary 29 (March 12–July 31, 1779), Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA. [https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=D29&bc=%2Fdigitaladams%2Farchive%2Fbrowse%2Fdate%2fall_1779.php](https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=D29&bc=%2Fdigitaladams%2Farchive%2Fbrowse%2Fdate%2Fall_1779.php)

10. “Declaration of Independence,” July 4, 1776, National Archives, Washington, D.C., <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

11. New and forthcoming books on Price include Rae Linda Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price* (University of Illinois Press, 2020);

Janet Nichols Lynch, *Florence Price: American Composer* (Dragonfeather Books, 2022); Ege, *South Side Impresarios*; Caplan, *Dreaming in Ensemble*; Samantha Ege and Kori Hill, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Florence Price* (Cambridge University Press, 2026). Recent recordings include *Florence B. Price: Concerto in One Movement, Symphony in E Minor*, New Black Music Repertory Ensemble, Leslie B. Dunner, Karen Walwyn, Albany Records, 2011; *My Dream: Art Songs and Spirituals*, Richard Heard and Roy L. Belfield Jr., Percentage Records, 2012; *Fantasie Negre: The Piano Music of Florence Price*, Samantha Ege, Lorelt, 2021; *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Philadelphia Orchestra, Deutsche Grammophon, 2023; and *Beyond the Years: Unpublished Songs of Florence Price*, Karen Slack, Michelle Cann, Azica Records, 2025. Also see the documentary film James Greeson and Dale Carpenter, *The Caged Bird: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price* (2015).

12. William Levi Dawson, *Negro Folk Symphony*, critical performance ed., ed. Gwynne Kuhner Brown (AMSCO Music Publishing, 2023).

13. For more information about gospel music analysis, see Braxton D. Shelley, “Analyzing Gospel,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 1 (2019): 181–243.

14. For more on Burleigh, see Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*.

15. Walt Whitman, “A Backward Glance o’er Travel’d Roads,” in *Leaves of Grass* (David McKay, 1891–1892), 435–38.

16. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1st ed. (New York: [Walt Whitman], 1855), iii.

17. For an account of Sherman’s march, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 807–30. For more on the poignant symbolism of Sherman’s march in American collective memory, see Anne Sarah Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman’s March and American Memory* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

18. Walt Whitman, “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” *Leaves of Grass* (1891–1892), 249.

19. For more on memory of the Civil War and national reconciliation, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

20. For more information on art song and concert spiritual performance, see Wilis Patterson, “The African-American Art Song: A Musical Means for Special Teaching and Learning,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 303–10; Lourin Plant, “Singing African-American Spirituals: A Reflection on Racial Barriers in Classical Music,” *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 5 (May/June 2005): 451–68; Barbara Steinhaus-Jordan, “Black Spiritual Art Song: Interpretive Guidelines for Studio Teachers,” *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 5 (May/June 2005): 477–85; Stephens and Helton, *Singing Down the Barriers*; Felicia Barber, *A New Perspective for the Use of Dialect in African American Spirituals: History, Context, and Linguistics* (Lexington Books, 2021); and Rosephanye Powell, *African American Spirituals Dialect: A Practical Guide for Singers, Voice Teachers and Choral Conductors* (Gentry Publications, 2024).

Chapter 8

1. To learn more about how this festival began and to hear more of the artists’ perspectives on the festival, see the panel discussion with Thomas Hampson, Louise

Toppin, Lawrence Brownlee, Roderick Cox, and Leah Hawkins, “Black Music Matters: Thomas Hampson in the Elbphilharmonie Talk ‘A Celebration of Black Music,’” posted June 5, 2021, by Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/GkQbaanSzzc>

2. Allen Hughes, “George Shirley, Tenor, Wins ‘Met’ Auditions and a Contract,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1961.

3. Gillian Reinhard, “Artist Profile: Legendary Tenor George Shirley,” *Opera Wire*, July 8, 2020, <https://operawire.com/artist-profile-legendary-tenor-george-shirley/>

4. Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford University Press, 2018).

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