The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era **15** (2016), 399–417
doi:10.1017/S1537781415000560

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781415000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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THE TENOR OF BELONGING: THE FISK JUBILEE SINGERS AND THE POPULAR CULTURES OF POSTBELLUM CITIZENSHIP

"The Tenor of Belonging" examines the origins of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a chorus of college students from Fisk University, amidst the official promises of the Reconstruction era, as well as their reception during their first national tour in 1871 and 1872. The article explores the bifurcated meanings behind the spiritual as the singers performed it in this new context. Publicly, it became, for well-to-do white Northern audiences, an image of a quintessential American identity rooted in the soil, "primitive Christianity," and the trope of redemption through suffering that seemed increasingly threatened in modern, incorporated America. And yet, spirituals had embodied ideals of self-making, piety, communal solidarity, and liberation for their singers since the late eighteenth century; and performing them, as the Jubilee Singers did, likewise became a vehicle for achieving financial security after the Civil War, as the chorus marketed its past in an effort to secure its future. The singers, like their slave forebears, used the spiritual to achieve a level of autonomy, cohesion, and pride as they negotiated the contours of citizenship in a reconfigured nation. As such, their work both prefigures Booker T. Washington's "bootstraps" ethos and W.E.B. Du Bois's "double-consciousness."

Writing on behalf of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Mark Twain took to his task "cheerfully." "I would walk seven miles to hear them sing again," he declared in an 1873 letter to Tom Hood, of his London publishing house of George Routledge and Sons. "You will recognize that this is strong language for me to use, when you remember that I never was fond of pedestrianism." But as if in acknowledgment of the singers' disarming power, Twain's wry recommendation quickly yielded to a more intensely personal engagement with what he had seen the previous winter at Hartford's Allyn Hall. He continued:

I think these gentlemen & ladies make eloquent music—& what is as much to the point, they reproduce the true melody of the plantations, & are the only persons I ever heard accomplish this on the public platform. The so-called "negro minstrels" simply misrepresent the thing; I do not think they ever saw a plantation or ever heard a slave sing.

I was reared in the South, & my father owned slaves, & I do not know when anything has so moved me as did the plaintive melodies of the Jubilee Singers. It was the first time for twenty-five or thirty years that I had heard such songs, or heard them sung in the genuine old way—& it is a

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way, I think, that white people cannot imitate—& never can, for that matter, for one must have been a slave himself in order to feel what that life was & so convey the pathos of it in music.[1]

Taken with "the genuine old way," and his relationship to it, Mark Twain both got and missed the point. He had indeed witnessed something deeply personal for the performers. Yet, despite gesturing toward the staged quality of the performance, nowhere in his letter did he mention the remunerative project at the heart of a Fisk Jubilee Singers concert; namely, fundraising for an institution of higher education that would usher former slaves or their children into liberal citizenship in the Reconstruction South. Rather, in his avidity to recuperate a "genuine" and "true" history, and to place it in counterpoint to popular culture's typical depiction of black performativity, the author transformed the singers into artifacts to be celebrated in the flush of his own nostalgia. In short, the concert only reenacted the racial distinctions that had marked his childhood, conjuring an experience with "authenticity" that Twain, who would eventually become famous for his nuanced depictions of the inner lives of slaves,[2] could never know except from the vantage of spectatorship on his father's Missouri plantation. What, we might ask, had young Samuel Clemens and older Mark Twain been privy to?

The Fisk Jubilee Singers remained a touchstone throughout Twain's life, soothing his homesickness while he was on book tours or pining for Missouri from his northeastern homes.[3] But his enthusiasm for seeking their "authenticity" over their agency situates the author squarely among his fellow audience members, most of who were watching spirituals for the first time. Over the course of an eighteen-month tour of the midwestern and northeastern United States, spanning 1871 and 1872, the rigorously trained chorus of African American students from Nashville's Fisk University was celebrated in the white press in ways that bound them up in a past they could seemingly never transcend. Watching these former slaves, or children of former slaves, sing spirituals, many imagined themselves transported to the plantation, a flashpoint for historical fantasia centered on life in the Deep South, but ultimately forming the core of a distinctly and quintessentially American sound and, indeed, history.

From the beginning boosters, and later, historians have framed the rise of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in triumphalist terms.[4] But in exploring the group's creation and reception during its first years of national prominence, I would like to suggest a more vexed legacy, one where the singers' "success" and "failure" existed in a mutually reinforcing bond. White middle- and upper-class audiences of the Reconstruction era appropriated and reshaped the singers in order to articulate what they found valuable in the nation's past and to imagine their own relationship to it. They centered the value on fantasies of a black vernacular tradition (the singing of spirituals) that, by their readings, could only be rooted in slavery's story of organic experience and redemption through suffering. But it was a tradition that remained ever relevant for the singers in their own ambitions as upwardly mobile college students: white listeners commoditized it, and Fisk University flourished. In this case, the music's value hid in plain sight—as it had for the better part of a century.[5]

By speaking to the demands of lived experience under slavery, the spiritual had been deployed to communicate a shared ideology whose public consumption hid the fact that it was also a vehicle for articulating personal aspirations toward freedom. Robert Darden explains this as "a 'rhetorical practice' designed to protect sensitive information from

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781415000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

outsiders." (At its most instrumental, for instance, Harriet Tubman "promoted the spiritual 'Wade in the Water' to demonstrate how to throw bloodhounds off the scent.")[6] After slavery, as well, the singers' story suggests that singing spirituals became a tool for articulating personal ambitions that were also encoded in the music and the very public performance of the spiritual. In public, their singing made them children of an American sublime. In private, it fostered images of self-making, of harnessing the lessons and ideals of the past to shape one's present.

HISTORY AND AMBITION AT FISK UNIVERSITY

Fisk University, which opened in January 1866, emerged as a consequence of the American Missionary Association's (AMA) shift from foreign missionary efforts to the more immediately meaningful task of working to ensure an improved quality of life for Southern African Americans navigating their way in a reconfigured South. Through private donations, the AMA set about establishing "training schools" for African American teachers and ministers. Named after Clinton Fisk, an agent in the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau, Fisk was founded on the site of a former Union hospital in northern Nashville, a city whose total population of 16,000 in 1866 was roughly a quarter African American (3,945). The city had long been considered a "a nostril," in the words of one midcentury visitor, which had long inhaled "the Northern air of free institutions." Indeed, Tennessee had been the only slaveholding state to permit the educational instruction of slaves.[7]

Methodist in its spiritual leanings, Fisk University seems to have embodied what one historian has called the denomination's "remorseless emphasis on … the need for human beings to take control of their spiritual destinies, not as passive respondents to the iron will of God, but as active agents 'working out [their] own salvation.'" Methodism had long framed slaves' experiences with Christianity. This was most likely because of the "association with song, music, rhythm, and emotional release from anxiety and from traditional social expressions of bodily comportment and restraint" that easily merged with West African religious and folk traditions that had been passed down through the generations. But Methodism's emphasis on second birth, "community support," and "fear of backsliding into the world left behind"[8] must have also provided spiritual bedrock for Fisk University's aspirational objectives. Indeed, boosters spoke of a millennial venture in the project. Adam Spence, the first principal, imagined the university's mission in an allusion to Moses's fate in *Exodus*: "And it was a study to see those earnest, dark faces, with their great, dreamy eyes, as they peered in at the portals of the temple of knowledge so long closed against them, and just got a glimpse of the glory beyond, and knew, if they themselves could not enter, their children might."[9] If slaves had long turned to the story of the Jews' liberation from Egypt as the central metaphor of their aspirations, Spence imagined Fisk's establishment as the arrival at Canaan after long years of wandering in a hostile place.

From its beginnings, the university told stories about itself that relied not only on typology, but also on a redemptive vision of history, of people transforming the brutal past into a promising present. The site itself, purchased for $16,000, was inauspicious. A "two-story frame building" made up the girls' dormitory, while the rest of the campus consisted, in the words of Fisk Jubilee Singer Ella Sheppard, of "low,

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one-story frame structures, totally unfit for the permanent housing of the school. The officers' quarters became the home of an earnest band of teachers; the sick-wards were fitted up as schoolrooms." Recalling such humble beginnings fifteen years after its founding, J.B.T. Marsh, an early university historian, couched the story of the school's origins in a narrative of redemption and renewal, turning the transition from slavery to a spiritually enlightened freedom into the central metaphor of Fisk's origin myth: "When a pile of rusty handcuffs and fetters from the abandoned slave-pen of the city came into the possession of the school, and were sold as old iron,… the money [was] invested in the purchase of Testaments and spellings books."[10]

A new person was to be made from this. "Objects and Aims," as expressed in an early promotional pamphlet, included "A Practical Business Education" and "The Training of Ministers." But Fisk also endeavored to shape the values and comportment of young men and women, emphasizing "The Physical, Intellectual, Moral, Social and Religious Training of Students without sectarian or denominational biases." Fisk strove to create, as early boosters declared, a total social-educational environment, "adapted to *Home*, School, & Church purposes." This included Victorian standards of "neatness and order, both in person and arrangement of books." The school prohibited "ardent spirits, tobacco in any form, and all games of chance."[11]

Among its "Specialties," Fisk advertised, "Vocal and Instrumental Music … taught and practiced in the most thorough and systematic manner by able and experienced teachers."[12] University treasurer George White, a Union veteran and former Freedmen's Bureau agent, was appointed to lead regular choral instruction of the school's most talented singers. Though not rooted in it, musical instruction under White included the singing of slave spirituals.[13] Chorus members frequently contributed these from their own memories of having sung them as children or of having listened to their parents sing them. Yet even as White asked his chorus to contribute whatever they knew of the music, he encountered resistance. One of his earliest pupils spoke for her colleagues when, years later, she recalled "the tendencies of the freedmen … to leave [the spirituals] behind in the grace of slavery." Ella Sheppard remembered, "They were associated with slavery and the dark past, and represented the things to be forgotten. Then, too, they were sacred to our parents, who used them in their religious worship and shouted over them. We finally grew willing to sing them privately."[14] The various strains of the group's reluctance—inherited trauma, sentimental protectiveness—strike an important note of self-recognition, both collective and individual. The singers conceived of themselves as something other than slaves. They did not reject their pasts; yet they were unwilling to let the past (or an audience's imagination of that past) dominate their senses of community, family, and, ultimately, self.

The rigor of these choral practices also suggests the group's attempts to distinguish its repertoire from the era's market for "black music"—a market that might have made them immediately financially successful, but would have undermined Fisk's goals and its students' self-fashioning and ambitions. By the middle nineteenth century, even whites' most empathetic and scholarly exploration of African American music typically held it up as an expression of distinctiveness, even uncanniness, which was more racial than circumstantial. For decades, a range of white observers (plantation mistress Mary Boykin Chestnut, Northern tourist Frederick Law Olmsted, novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, and a host of the two million Union soldiers, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and

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missionaries writing home from a war-torn South) had reckoned with the unique music they heard, first on plantations, later in contraband camps and the barracks of all-black regiments, and eventually in church meetings.[15] However sympathetically some of these studies may have been, observers and early chroniclers rendered the spiritual an index for the discussion of black difference, shored up even as African American people were granted citizenship. For instance, *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867), a massive *catalogue raissonné* of 136 numbers, began by emphasizing the failure inherent in its task, rendering songbook ethnography. The "voices of the colored people have a peculiar quality that nothing can imitate," the editors announced in their prologue; "and the intonations and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper."[16] Black people, for all their associations with the American landscape and with a quintessentially national history, belonged as artifacts and not as citizens.

The chorus both played to these expectations and subtly subverted them, giving audiences enough to imagine themselves encountering an unmediated expression of the "authentic," while also shoring up a late-Victorian dignity that would make the cause of Fisk seemingly worthwhile. It was a taxing process, physically and emotionally, for the Fisk chorus to compile and perform their songs in ways that were attuned to, but still challenged, the popular culture of black music and music making. Indeed, under George's White's instruction, the singers did not simply replicate the sounds of their parents. Georgia Gordon Taylor remembered that White "would keep us singing all day until he was satisfied that we had every soft or loud passage to suit his fastidious taste," which demanded "perfect enunciation."[17] White's "interpretation" was to render these songs into delicate four-part harmonies. Indeed, what emerged instead from these practices was a professional grammar that strove to create a vision of "naturalness of expression," an amalgam of force and tenderness. As musicologist Sandra Graham notes, "[i]n arranging the spirituals, White probably was concerned with making them exotic enough to sound interesting, but familiar enough that audiences could recognize them as relatives of music they were accustomed to," thus creating "a polished concert performance with spirituals resembling hymns." Indeed, based on her survey of white reactions to black spirituals in the mid-nineteenth century, musicologist Dena Epstein has shown that "The irregular rhythms, rhapsodic singing, rasping voices, and bodily movements would have seemed at that time an irreligious blending of the minstrel show and a church service, too offensive to be tolerated [by middle-class audiences]."[18] Locking himself and his choir in a room, White instructed them to sing the spiritual in *pianissimo* tones. Mary Spence remembered listening to these earliest practices as a little girl: "He used to tell the singers to put into the tone the intensity that he would give to the most forcible one that they could sing, and yet to make it as soft as they possibly could." White employed a vivid metaphor in his instruction: "If a tiger should step behind you, you would not hear the fall of his foot, yet all the strength of the tiger would be in that tread." Sheppard remembered, "to prepare them for public singing required much rehearsing."[19]

Deviation and improvisation were discouraged. Jennie Jackson could "remember how anxious I used to be to do well" in such practices. When once, in her "zeal," she "forgot where [she] was," White chided her, announcing to the group, "That little girl who sings so loud is making discord."[20] Was the freeborn Jackson[21] giving herself over to the music's power, imagining herself in a backwoods camp meeting or on the plantations

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where her parents worked? She was ambiguous on the reason for her "zeal." But her initial self-consciousness, and White's belittling response to her lack of control, points up an early recognition of the chorus as anxiety provoking in its rigor—and of understanding the importance of public presentation in securing an audience and circulating a message. Emotional release no doubt sutured generational fissures, acting as an empowering connection with the past. But the ability to control that connection—to make it marketable and "respectable"—was crucial to its public face and to the standards of the chorus itself.

Moreover, in early performances in Tennessee and Georgia, the Fisk University chorus defined itself precisely in terms of its ability to transcend the racial designations confidently delineated by white writers. It ignored the spiritual altogether. Rather than pointing up the *difference* that had long served as the distinguishing marker of black performativity, White and his students emerged on the public stage with a repertoire emphasizing musical virtuosity, from the *Cantata of Esther* to a multi-ethnic mélange of polka and Irish jig. Not just form, but also content, situated the chorus within larger national currents. The original composition, "The Tombs of Our Brave," performed at the National Cemetery in Nashville in 1871, emphasized nothing so much as the chorus's solemn participation in the postbellum death cult that David Blight has described as the unique province of white reckoning and reunion. "Let cannon boom forth and banners all wave,/While we mingle our tears o'er the tombs of the brave," sang the chorus, emphasizing not victory but the "wail of a nation in grief o'er its dead."[22]

For Adam Spence, these performances augered well for his millennial prophecies. He was "sure could the colored people hear the students sing it would inspire them with more courage for their race and desire to educate their children and no doubt it would bring us students."[23] But performing locally was physically dangerous. The Reconstruction South (including relatively tolerant Nashville) still held out danger for African American performers, especially when working for an institution of higher education. Despite the official promise of Reconstruction, African Americans in Tennessee, as elsewhere, became the targets of political and physical violence. In September 1871, less than four months after Fisk singers performed "The Tombs of Our Brave," at the National Cemetery in their home city, Nashville witnessed the spectacle of ex-Union Commander, former Lincoln associate, and then-Missouri Senator Carl Schurz implicitly rejecting the idea of interracial reunion. Presenting his vision of the emerging creed of Liberal Republicanism, Schurz outlined a platform that, among other things, "advocated political amnesty, an end to federal intervention, and a return to 'local self-government.'" Schurz's vision offered an opening in the vigilante violence of the Ku Klux Klan, which engaged in episodes of "spontaneous violence" in Tennessee during this period.[24] Despite Fisk's détente with white Nashvillians,[25] playing off Confederate sentiments was a potent political tool and was folded into a larger atmosphere that seemed to give tacit approval to anti-black violence in order to maintain "order." In this milieu, the student chorus, as White wrote a colleague, sometimes "received private notice of such a nature that we wisely took the first train home." Both the fundraising ambitions and the movements toward inclusion in larger national narratives seem to have been especially galling. Nor were the chorus's white leaders any safer. Adam Spence privately described "much bitterness showered on the singers and especially toward us 'white niggers'"[26]—an aspersion that aligned them with a long line of white supporters of Reconstruction,

from the teachers who fanned into the countryside and cities of the South to Freedmen's Bureau agents, who were seen as destabilizing the work of the "Redeemers."

FIRST NATIONAL TOUR

If the chorus had positioned itself as capable of belonging in a larger American milieu (including one predicated on notions of sectional reunion typically reserved for white Americans), it soon became clear that for many audience members, the singers satisfied nostalgic yearnings for an "authentic"—and fast-disappearing—national past. As funds trickled away, the grounds fell into disrepair, and, in the words of one contemporary, the "privations and limited food began to tell on the students," George White imagined a revenue-earning tour of the North. Despite an initial reluctance from AMA members and university faculty, who feared both the prospects of failure and the denigration of their cause through music making's potential association with "entertainment,"[27] the officials relented. On October 6, 1871, contraltos Minnie Tate and Eliza Walker; basses Isaac Dickerson and Greene Evans; tenors Benjamin Holmes and Thomas Rutling; and sopranos Jennie Jackson, Maggie Porter, and Ella Sheppard (also the group's pianist) set off for Cincinnati (the city long mythologized as the destination of escaped slaves), and a tour that would take them from the midwest to New England, and as far south as Washington, DC.[28]

George White early on recognized the importance of a carefully orchestrated promotional apparatus. Within six weeks, he crafted a plan to ensure full houses. "Please do what you can to stir up a public sentiment ahead of us through the papers and churches," he solicited university principal E. M. Cravath. "How would it do to print a *circular*, setting forth the facts regarding the class—and the enterprise[?]" By February 1872, he spoke with the expertise of four busy months: "We have found that the advertising must have time to soak into the people—and that it must be done systematically."[29] In fact, the entire promotional apparatus was more elaborate: informative notices were placed in newspapers, providing date, place, and time of concerts, and reprinting testimony to the group's "benevolent design"; posters with the same information were plastered throughout the city; "*dodgers*," or slips of paper with favorable testimony, were distributed to stores and even private residences; and notices of the concert's edifying potential were sent to churches to be read to worshippers. The result, at $100 a city, meant that touring was, without successful returns, prohibitively expensive, especially when added to the cost of hall rental ($50 to $100 per night), and an additional $100 to $200 per day to account for "ushers, ticket-sellers, programs, pianos, hotel bills, … and car fare."[30]

Tapping into a network of sympathetic clergy and civic leaders, the unnamed chorus proceeded from town to town. Appearing in evening dress, and opening with brief speeches setting down the group's fundraising ambitions for Fisk University,[31] they performed a staid repertoire of popular and ethnic folk songs that were *de riguer* for concert performances at the time. Numbers included patriotic tunes such as the "Star-Spangled Banner" and "Red, White, and Blue"; sentimental songs such as "Away to the Meadows"; and a few slave spirituals that would have been, by then, well known to audiences.[32]

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By November the group had, at George White's goading, assumed the title, "Fisk Jubilee Singers." The name was derived from *Leviticus* 25:10, with its injunction to "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you shall return to his family property and each to his own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines." The "Jubilee" had long served in slave culture as a symbol of the millennial moment of Emancipation.[33] But as White explained to a colleague, the title was uniquely suited to *contemporaneous* concerns; namely, to the transitional status of African Americans, especially in the South, after the war. It "se[t] forth their peculiar position before the people," White noted, "as standing on the border between 'the old and the new,' reaching back, as they do, in their experience and memory, in the '*old*,' being actively identified with the work of the '*new*' and looking forward with hope to a future full of promise."[34] White's evocation of typology as the appropriate lens through which to view his singers' condition vindicated the slave vernacular, which, as Lawrence Levine has noted, "fuse[d] the precedents of the past, the conditions of the present, and the promise of the future into one connected reality."[35] "Jubilee's" association with renewal and ancestral return illuminated how the past formed the bedrock of narratives of self-development. Thus, by evoking the past, the Fisk Jubilee Singers looked forward, toward the promise of upward mobility. As such, they served as a counterpoint to other visions of blackness then well entrenched in Northern politics and culture: African American life as intrinsically bound to a patriarchal, proud, premodern, abundant, simple, and happy Southern plantation "family." The name retained a "dignity," Sheppard remembered, "which appealed to us."[36]

Most critics saw a kind of "dignity," too—but a "dignity" that privileged stories of suffering over self-making. Early appraisals emphasized the belief that what the chorus expressed could "never be repeated or imitated by grinning apes and mountebanks calling themselves minstrels"; or that it could even be "a relief from the labored fun and dubious sentiment of professional negro minstrels."[37] Certainly, the singers expressed a degree of unselfconscious spontaneity that underscored their emotional attachment to the music and seemed to provide unmediated contact with "the real thing." The music itself became a window into historical experience. The "ever-recurring refrains of both melody and words … pitched in a minor key" could only have been "born … of intensest [*sic*] anguish, and of utter earthly hopelessness," suggested one critic. The Singers "told their own story, by their appearance and their songs, far better than any one else could tell it for them."[38]

The singers did not reject claims that they were emissaries. More to the point, they played to them. Within a month and a half of the chorus's Cincinnati debut, the repertoire of secular and sacred music, an average ratio of 17:2, remembered Sheppard, was "inverted"—a move that was both personally edifying and professionally pragmatic. Sheppard noted this complementary relationship, evoking both the subjective benefits of spirituals, which had long served as ballast amidst struggle and an index for ambition, and their appeal to a consuming public: "Our suffering, and the demand of the public changed this order." The result was concert as imaginative tableau, effectively drawing audiences into the past, while making past practice not just relevant, but *essential*. Georgia Gordon Taylor recalled, "Every night some of them would tell the story of having mother sold away and then sing, 'No More Auction Block for Me,' 'Nobody knows that Trouble I

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See' [*sic*], 'Steal Away to Jesus.'" She nevertheless emphasized the sincerity of this venture as suturing both intergenerational and interpersonal fissures. "Does one wonder," she asked, "that the tears rolled down the cheeks of those who listened? What comes from the heart reaches the heart."[39] Taylor thus imagined the ways in which authentic historical practice provided listeners with newly subjective experiences, rather than a foray into artifact collection.

A touristic fetish nevertheless underwrote a number of early reviews. Critics frequently imagined the plantation tableau that the singers conjured with their songs. This was a pastiche of slave cabin, cotton field, and camp meeting. A journalist in Detroit, for instance, was transported by a vision of slave monoculture that collapsed regional and temporal distinctions: "The simplest of songs, with their ever-recurring refrain of both melody and words, have been sung in thousands of lowly cabins, scattered all over the South for scores of years past—have been sung in the rice swamp and cotton field." Others similarly dwelt upon the varied markers of the plantation experience: "Listening to their rich, plaintive voices, one might imagine himself in the veritable Uncle Tom's cabin of the 'old dispensation'"; "they make their mark by giving the spirituals and plantation hymns as only *they* can sing who know how to keep time to a master's whip"; the music had "the real plantation twang."[40]

But many critics also sought a more meaningful message and experience that suggest something of the singers' allure in the postbellum decade. Music had, for decades, been a flashpoint for meditations on an innate American character. *The Atlantic Monthly* sought, from its first issue in 1857, to "invent" a national music that was not derivative of European folk musical models, which could speak to experience in America, and which, presumably, rejected the grotesquerie of blackface minstrelsy. A similar ambition had been expressed the previous year in Boston's highbrow *Dwight's Journal of Music*.[41] The search for pure, natural, national song was, Jon Cruz has shown, part of a larger effort by elites to tease out an American artistic tradition rooted in Protestant ideology and separation from "machines, the marketplace, and the worst of the now undesired European pretensions."[42] Consequently, for many, the slave spiritual was the ideal mode of patriotic expression, predicated on a particularly Christianized vision of the United States. Simple piety, true belief, and tropes of redemption through struggle were, in the words of the era's most popular novel, most fully manifested in African American slaves. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe asserted, "Certainly they will, in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness … exhibit the highest form of the peculiarly *Christian life*."[43] In such discussions, the American slave embodied a pure Christian piety that had been lost to cold and calculating Anglo Americans. The experience of slavery, with its various tests of the body and spirit, was the crucible upon which an organic American Christianity emerged.

This was communicable. For the vast majority of critics, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were important because they had a transformative effect on their audience, tying them to sublime nature or prompting them to adopt a typological vision of national history, seeing in profane events echoes of the sacred. In this regard, it is significant that, even though concerts drew an array of citizens, from poor African Americans to wealthy whites, reviewers almost invariably emphasized the presence of a certain class, variously

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noted as "elite," the "leading white citizens," a "splendid array of elegantly dressed people," or a "cultivated … assemblage."[44] The music itself undermined pretension: Critics described the music as "touch[ing] a chord which the most consummate art fails to reach," it was "an infection … that is rarely felt amid the artistic coldness of our fashionable churches." A "cultivated Brooklyn assemblage was moved and melted under the magnetism of [the] music" as it "touched the fount of tears, and gray-haired men wept like little children." Theodore Seward, then-editor of the *New York Musical Gazette*, and soon-to-become stage manager for the Singers, was "certain that the critic stands completely disarmed in their presence."[45] "At last, the American school of music has been discovered," announced the eminent *Dwight's Journal of Music*. Rather than proposing what "an American school of music" entailed, *Dwight's* described what it *did not*. "We have had accomplished virtuosi, skillful vocalists and talented composers," the anonymous editorialists continued. "They have, however, all trodden the beaten track. It has remained for the obscure and uncultured Negro race in this country to prove that there is an original style of music peculiar to America."[46] Thus, as embodied by the performers of spirituals, a truly national music could be defined by what it seemed to lack: "culture" and "education," imitation and cultivation. In an era when politicians, intellectuals, and artists sought an "organic nationalism" and when cultural critics believed that the nation's ethnic heterogeneity bedeviled the flowering of a truly national music,[47] piety, expressive purity, and a distillation of autochthonous experience were often seen as rendering an art form "American."

Privileging the music as natural represented a patriotic investment. Indeed, a Fisk Jubilee Singers concert offered an experience with a mythicized American tradition that seemed to embody the pietistic, organic, and antimodern values that formed the core of a threatened American identity.[48] Many reviewers appraised the performance as valuable precisely insofar as it could be measured *against* the bland imperatives of the concert performance. Rare were reviews touching on values of high art and musical merit.[49] Rather, most critics referred to the Fisk Jubilee Singers as "children of nature" emerging from an organic American experience.

For some, that is, lyrical meaning was entirely beside the point. Writing to the editor of the *Waterbury Daily American*, "C. P." was transported by a Jubilee Singers concert. Writing of himself in the third person, he was recalled to another time:

> He was waiting in the cars at City Point from midnight until daylight for the train to start for Petersburg. About daybreak the "hands" on an adjoining plantation passed on their way to the tobacco field to begin their hopeless and to them profitless toil. They were singing; not in joy for the song was too sadly plaintive for that; not in despair for the hopeless do not sing. What the words were I could not tell, nor did I care to know; but wave on wave of wild, weird melody, that told what no language can tell came rolling over us, as the ghostly shadows of the night, a long, dark, wearisome night it had been, were flying before the beautiful morning.[50]

Ignoring the songs' content, "C. P." tied their music to natural rhythms, as "wave on wave." The songs' psychological and lyrical inscrutability only made them more profound as expressions of a "wild, weird melody" that was organic, innate. It also compelled meditations on the millennial moment, as the "ghostly" night becomes the "beautiful morning"—a sense that the natural national destiny was a story of freedom.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781415000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Part of that provision was an assertion that American history represented the culmination of sacred history. The *Newark Evening Courier* made the connection: "Pharaoh and Chariot, and the Trumpet, and Daniel, and the Hebrew Children, and The Lord, were largely dwelt upon, calling the hearer's attention to the fact that not in all history, profane or sacred, has an event been recorded of greater grandeur than that which will bloom forever in the crown of America as its brightest jewel—the emancipation of her slaves."[51] Theodore Cuyler similarly averred, "Our people can now listen to the genuine soul music of the slave cabins, before the lord led his children out of the Land of Egypt and the house of bondage."[52] Cuyler does not only twin the experience of African American slavery with Scripture. In fact, he speaks in the typological language of the spiritual itself, seeing the events of history as a holy struggle in much the way that slaves themselves frequently did, by evoking the Old Testament as lived experience.[53]

Crucially, though, the Newark review did not allow for agency among the singers, whom it described as "a band of gentle savages from Tennessee" who "sang as if they couldn't help it" and were best imaged through the language of the auction block. In this sense, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were drawn hopelessly into the past. The literal centerpiece of this review was a cast list:

> Lot 1.—Negro man, very black, six feet high, worth in old times, $2,000 under the hammer.—Basso.
>
> Lot 2.—Mulatto, $1,500.—Tenor.
>
> Lot 3.—Mulatto, $1,500.—Tenor.
>
> Lot 4.—Jennie Jackson, full-bodied brunette; very dark eyes and hair, which seem light in contrast with a brow like that in which Shakespeare's lover saw Helen's beauty.
>
> Lot 5.—Maggie Porter, a constructive blond with curly hair.—Soprano.
>
> Lot 6.—Miss Shephrd [*sic*], a handsome, intelligent-looking quadroon.—Pianist.
>
> Lot 7.—Minnie Tate, a charming little quadroon of about 15 years of age, with Straight hair, falling loosely down her back.—Contralto and Soprano.
>
> Lot 8.—Young girl with eyes and hair (and face) as black as a beaver.—Contralto.
>
> Lot 9.—Pickanniny, about 12 years old, black as the … devil.—Alto singer and Orator.[54]

Karen Sánchez-Eppler has written of the ways in which, in the context of sentimental literature, "the valuation of depictions of slavery may rest upon the same psychic ground as slaveholding itself."[55] Paradoxically, the liberation at the core of their music—a message that was often presented as quintessentially American—could only exist within the matrix of enslavement. Some believed that the Fisk Jubilee Singers would "give many the *best*, and perhaps the only opportunity to hear a class of music which can never be produced again after the present generation of freedmen have passed away." Others averred that their songs, "rendered in a genuine musical and weird style, will soon belong to the past, if indeed, they do not now" and that they performed "music that can never be heard again when those who have endured [slavery] shall have passed away."[56]

And yet, the performance of spirituals by the Fisk Jubilee Singers provided a hidden transcript, a strain of lived experience under the layers of public acclaim and fetishization. With their capacious typological metaphors of emancipation, revolt, transcendence, and redemption through suffering, these songs were fluid enough to register present circumstances. The music's elasticity was such that songs such as "Gospel Train" ("Get on

board, children,/For there's room for many a more") and "Room Enough" ("For my Lord says there's room enough,/Room enough in the Heavens for you")[57] could, on an immediate level, signify Heaven, and on a subtler one, the United States after the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. The martial imagery in numbers such as "Turn Back Pharaoh's Army" ("You say you are a soldier,/Fighting for your Saviour") and "Children, You'll Be Called On" ("Children, you'll be called on,/To March in the field of battle") resonated as much with the Civil War as it did with the everyday struggles under the slave regime.[58] Nor did that struggle have to end with Emancipation. Indeed, "Children, You'll Be Called One" made struggle and the possibility for redemption a crucial part of existence, and one that had to be maintained following Emancipation: "When this warfare'll be ended,/I'm a soldier of the jubilee."

Nor should we think about the coded meanings of the spirituals as antithetical to their musical and lyrical constructions. The spiritual has long served as a source of scrutiny, and a good deal of this has centered on the tension between individuality/agency and community/tradition. As modern ethnomusicological and historical scholarship has demonstrated, this tension was actually a delicate rapprochement, even a symbiosis, what Lawrence Levine has termed "an improvisational communal consciousness," whereby "older songs are constantly re-created into essentially new entities."[59] The communal matrix serves as a springboard for a project of self-actualization that is attentive to history—but not fettered by it. Consider "Many Thousand Gone," a six-verse spiritual that appeared in *Jubilee Songs*: "No more auction block for me./No more, no more./ No more auction block for me,/Many thousand gone." The refrain was repeated to describe the "driver's lash," the "pint o' salt," the "hundred lash," the "mistress' call."[60] The song graphically evokes slavery's everyday brutality, touching as it does upon the commodification, near starvation, corporal punishment, torture, and calls to obedience that were intrinsic to the slave regime. Simultaneously, it charts a path between belonging and transcendence. The singer is at once a member of a community of "many thousand" who have also experienced these horrors and a unique individual whose future is premised on the negation of this life ("No more").

But what seems most striking about a song such as "Many Thousand Gone" is its insistence upon the first-person singular, the "me" of the first and third lines. For not only is the spiritual's "fundamental theme … the need for a change in the existing order," but its syntactical structure revolves around agency. According to musicologist John Lovell, it speaks to a belief "in self-reliance and self-responsibility."[61] Singing spirituals for white Northern audiences was a stratagem, as well: Encoded in the music was a message to donate money and sympathy to the cause of Southern black education and empowerment.

Performance, then, was complex aspiration masquerading as simple music making. This was made clear to audiences when, during a Middletown, Connecticut, concert, "some white boys and colored people in the galleries disturbed the singers and the audience by noises that called forth a well-merited rebuke from the soprano of the troupe." The unnamed singer broke character, telling her "'colored friends' that in addition to singing songs, one part of their mission was to prove that the black race were susceptible of refining influences, but if the colored folk behaved like monkeys all the Republicans in the world would not cause them to become respected."[62] Having raised $40,000 through admissions, sales of songbooks, and private donations, frequently prefacing their

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concerts with introductory speeches setting forth their ambitions,[63] they were nevertheless struggling for something beyond fame or money.

SELF-NARRATION IN THE CULTURE OF FISK UNIVERSITY

The Fisk Jubilee Singers inspired a number of commercially successful histories in the wake of their first tour, chief among them Gustavus Pike's *The Jubilee Singers and Their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars* (1873). Pike's account, the American edition of which sold almost ten thousand copies within its first three months of publication,[64] was written in response to the overwhelming curiosity among audience members seeking to learn more about the Fisk Jubilee Singers. He wove a narrative account, written up as a series of public lectures that compiled newspaper reviews, private conversation, and the contemporaneous "under cover" tradition of reportage that would soon take flight with muckraking journalism.

Importantly, Pike, an AMA member who served as press agent for the tour, locates the chorus's belonging within a national history favoring progress and self-making over a primal attachment to the soil. From its opening pages, *The Jubilee Singers* draws a critical line between public reception and private ambition. Pike writes about the Fisk Jubilee Singers as individuals rather than cultural abstractions or anachronisms who could satisfy nostalgic yearnings for an "authentic" past. Indeed, rather than calling for a recognition of ancient African genius, or anecdotal evidence of African Americans' participation in a larger national history, as had William Wells Brown in *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863),[65] Pike positions the singers as *central* to an understanding and appreciation of American history writ large. "It is not so much what one *intends* as what he *accomplishes*," the author avers, before telescoping two-and-a-half centuries of American accomplishment, beginning with the Puritans "start[ing] for the mouth of the Hudson, but land[ing] at Plymouth." In this same way,

> Mr. White commenced to teach Sunday school songs, but went on to drill his choir to sing operatic music. He started North in '71 to sing the more difficult and popular music of the day, composed by our best native and foreign artists; but he found his well-disciplined choir singing the old religious slave songs, his audience demanding these, and satisfied with little besides, till the cries of the oppressed went echoing all over the North, as some rare heaven-born relic of a bondage past.[66]

The Jubilee Singers were participating in a project of mythopoesis extending back at least to Benjamin Franklin and gaining credence in the success cults of modern businessmen and robber barons—but also of a piece with African American works of self-development such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1845) and, eventually, Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901).[67]

As early as 1873, the chorus sustained a shifting cast of characters, most already Fisk University students, but some recruited for the express purpose of performing under George White's charge. Both choirmaster and chorus were soon aware of what being a Fisk Jubilee Singer meant. Traveling to Memphis to court the tailor Benjamin Loudin (basso), White reportedly asked, "if he thought he could 'stand being flattered & praised for one year.'" He would go on to write, "I have found a first rate man as bass singer…. He is an Ohio man, is a musician *naturally* & *professionally*."[68] A rotating chorus would soon tour Europe and eventually return to the North and Midwest. There, a

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decade after their first, brilliant success, critics would denounce what they perceived as they inauthentic qualities of a refined style. The *Hartford Daily Times* lamented how the group had "lost the wild rhythm." Whereas the original Jubilee Singers performed "with all the flavor of pine woods, of camp-meetings," by 1881, such "flavor" had been "softened and refined away."[69]

By contrast, Ella Sheppard Moore, professionally and financially successful like many of her fellow Jubilee Singers,[70] well knew the ways in which the slave spiritual could harness the past toward self-betterment, of the ways in which a recognition of the past did not necessitate nostalgia or preclude change. Sometime between her marriage to fellow Fisk University alumnus George Moore in 1878 and her death in 1915, Moore composed an eight-page pamphlet under the auspices of the AMA, which she entitled, *Before Emancipation*, an eloquent and unnerving account of the antebellum plantation milieu from which the spiritual emerged.

Before Emancipation opens onto a brutal plantation tableau, constituted by family dissolution, infanticide, the "inevitable liability to separation of man and wife, and parents and children," and other atrocities "[i]t is not proper to tell." In this setting, a kind of noble suffering was hard to see. "The girls," Moore avers, "looked like old women, the old women like dried up animals. They had been so abused that even the little girls of ten were misshapen."[71] *This* was the environment from which the spiritual emerged and in which it served not only as psychic balm or release, but as stratagem: "The slaves often communicated with one another, as well as with the Lord, through their songs. The master only heard the song, but the slave received a message. When they sang, 'Steal Away to Jesus,' it meant that there would be a secret meeting that night to worship the Lord, to pray for a better day."[72]

Moore folds the slaves' history into a larger national mythos of self-making, limited though it was by the valuations of her time. "It was a great advance over the heathen life in Africa, to have even a crude conception of God and the Christian life, which are so well expressed in their religious songs," she asserted, echoing a trope extending back at least a far as colonial-era African American poet Phyllis Wheatley.[73] Moore's concluding vision reached far forward, as well, proposing self-actualization and cultural accretion that celebrated the past as handmaiden to the future. "And we see that language, religion and labor were the three great factors learned in slavery," she concluded, "used by our Lord when He saw that we were ready to enter the door of a greater opportunity."[74]

If Moore believed that the Divine had uniquely blessed slaves, she did not see that blessing rooted in a stultifying or marginalizing condition, but as forming the bedrock for self-development. Simultaneously, she sought to reclaim African American history, away from the stereotypes of a regressive, wild mind and body and toward a process of self-actualization rooted in an egalitarian sense of opportunity. Hers was the impulse to use the past—both to be inspired by it and to harness it toward material gain—as the basis for a lifelong project of self-actualization and for a claim on her own personal sense of belonging.

The emergence of the Fisk Jubilee Singers on the national stage, then, represents a moment of both expansion and limitation in the Reconstruction era. Celebrated as quintessentially American for their ostensibly pure, pious, autochthonous music, they used that music to knowingly participate in a project of self-making that was equally as old

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781415000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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in its associations with a quintessentially American identity. In this way, the singers prefigure both the bootstraps ethos of Booker T. Washington and the "double-consciousness" of W.E.B. Du Bois, both of who would rise to prominence within two decades of the singers' debut. While the Fisk Jubilee Singers never purposefully *hid* their ambitions, they were happy to play a part that rewarded them. Indeed, the limits of this success are also telling and may suggest something about the end of Reconstruction itself. While audiences were quick to denounce slavery, they were also quick to denounce anything that seemed to transcend the carefully delineated image of blackness writ large. Nina Silber has provocatively described the ways in which tourists to the postbellum South described black poverty as "picturesque." Relegating people to "types" allowed for their marginalization, disenfranchisement, and an ultimate apology for Jim Crow's perverted logic of racial "order."[75] The Jubilee Singers inhabited a liminal space in this sense. They clearly belonged—but where?

NOTES

[1]Samuel Langhorne Clemens to Tom Hood and George Routledge and Sons, Mar. 10, 1873, Hartford, CT (UCCL 00886). In Mark Twain Project Online. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. <http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL008 86.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>, accessed Feb. 10, 2011.

[2]Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Random House, 1996 [1885]). In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (New York: Bantam Classic, 2005 [1889]), ch. 21, Twain has his eponymous hero, Hank Morgan, describe being a slave in Arthurian England.

[3]Mark Twain saw the Fisk Jubilee Singers five times within three years. While in England, lecturing on his travels through the Sandwich Islands, and severely homesick, he sat down at hotel pianos to play "jubilee songs" for friends and acquaintances. Charles Warren Stoddard, *Exits and Entrances: A Book of Essays and Sketches* (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1903), 65.

[4]For instances from the New Negro movement, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994 [1903]), 156; Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood; or, the Hidden Self* (1902), *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 450–54; *The Book of American Negro Spirituals: Including The Book of American Negro Spirituals and the Second Book of American Negro Spirituals*, eds. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamund Johnson (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1981 [1925 and 1926]), 18–19; and John Wesley Work, *Folk Song of the American Negro* (Nashville: Press of Fisk University, 1915). For more contemporary scholarship, see Toni P. Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus": The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian Reconstruction, 1871–1878* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010); Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 7; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 89–90; and "Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a 'Changing' Same," *Black Music Research Journal*, 11:2 (Autumn 1991): 111–36; Sandra Jean Graham, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The Beginning of an American Tradition" (PhD diss., NYU, 2001); Eric Bernard Grant, "'Message In Our Music': Spirituals and the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation, 1871 to 1945" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005), ch. 1; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 227–31; Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

[5]It would be illuminating to know what the black press made of the singers. But as Genithia Hogges points out, "African-American periodicals… [were d]isturbingly silent…. From *Freedom's Journal* … to the *Christian Recorder*… no attention was paid" to the chorus. Genithia Lilie Hogges, "Canonization Reconstructed: Inclusion and Exclusion in Nineteenth-Century African-American Periodicals, with an Ear to the Music of African-Americans," *American Periodicals* 12 (2002): 155.

[6]Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 80–81.

[7]Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865–1946* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 3; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 96.

[8]David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 58, 131, 135, 62. John McCardell explores the complicated history of Methodism among white southerners in *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 193–200. Slave religion has been extensively documented. See, for instance, Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Role: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 159–84; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, ch. 9; and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[9]A. K. Spence, "The Freedmen: Tennessee: State Teacher's Institute," *American Missionary* 32:1 (Jan. 1878): 15.

[10]Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," *Fisk University News: The Jubilee Singers* 2:5 (Oct. 1911): 93; Helen C. Morgan, "Fisk University Before the Singers Went Forth," *Fisk University News: The Jubilee Singers* 2:5 (Oct. 1911): 14–15; J.B.T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers; with Their Songs* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880), 12. As Eric Foner has described it, this goal was a "typical nineteenth century amalgam of benevolent uplift and social control … aimed simultaneously to equip the freedmen to take full advantage of citizenship, and to remake the culture blacks had inherited from slavery, by inculcating qualities of self-reliance and self-discipline." Foner, *Reconstruction*, 146.

[11]Ogden, John "Fisk University," n.d., AMAA H9672; Smith, E. P. to M. E. Strieby, Oct. 11, 1865, AMAA, H8973; Spence, Adam to E. M. Cravath, October 4, 1870, AMAA, H9529; Ogden, John, "Rules and Regulations of the Fisk University" (pamphlet), n.d., AMAA.

[12]Ogden, John, "Fisk University," n.d., AMAA, H9672.

[13]Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus,"* 39.

[14]Moore, "Historical Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 43. See also, the unsigned speech, given Mar. 1873, reprinted in Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus,"* 39.

[15]See John D. Cox, *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), ch. 5. For a brief description of white reactions to African American music in the South, see Ronald Radano, "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals," *Critical Inquiry*, 22:3 (Spring 1996): 506–44.

[16]William Francis Allen, Lucy McKim Garrison, and Charles Pickard Ware, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867), i, iv–v.

[17]Taylor, "Reminiscences," *Fisk University News*, 29.

[18]Graham, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers," 186; Dena J. Epstein, "Black Spirituals: Their Emergence Into Public Knowledge," *Black Music Research Newsletter* 10:1 (Spring 1990): 63.

[19]Spence, "Character Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 4; Samuel Floyd, quoted in Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing for* Jesus," 103; Moore, "Historical Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 48. See also Work, *Folk Song of the American Negro*, 104.

[20]Jennie Jackson, quoted in Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 62.

[21]See Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 61.

[22]"Fisk University! Concert at Masonic Hall Two Nights, Thursday & Friday March 9th & 10th. The Cantata of Esther, the Beautiful Queen!," (1871), Jubilee Singers Scrapbook 1867–1872, Archivan and Manuscript Collections, the John Hope and Aurelia Elizabeth Franklin Library, Fisk University (hereafter, JSS 1867–1872); "Fisk School. Grand Entertainment at Masonic Hall on Thursday Evening, May 30," JSS 1867–1872; "Fisk School Entertainment. Second Night! Friday Evening, May 31," JSS 1867–1872; "Order of Exercises at the National Cemetery, Nashville, Tenn., On the 30th May, 1871," JSS 1867–1872.

[23]Spence, Adam to E. M. Cravath. Apr. 6, 1871, AMAA, H9672.

[24]Foner, *Reconstruction*, 500; Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 39.

[25]White Nashville politicians and merchants maintained a professional, if symbiotic, relationship with Fisk University. As A. A. Taylor showed in 1954, between the university's founding and the new century, while the "strictly sociable relations between the officers and members of the Fisk faculty and the Southerners were negligible,… the institutional officers maintained good business relations with their neighbors in Nashville, especially with the leaders in business and education. The university and its students spent thousands of dollars with Nashville business houses. Merchants and their proprietors supported

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projects of Fisk students … and they gave employment of the traditional type to Fisk students…. Among the educators, moreover, professional association extended to the offering of advice, the attendance of Southerners as guests at Fisk ceremonial and concerts and, to a limited extent, of the observation by Fisk students of science and their teachers of demonstrations and experiments in the laboratories of others institutions." A. A. Taylor, "Fisk University and the Nashville Community, 1866–1900," *The Journal of Negro History* 39:2 (Apr. 1954): 118–19.

[26]White, George to E. M. Cravath, Sept. 29, 1871, AMAA, H9821; Spence, Adam to E. M. Cravath, Sept. 13, 1871, AMAA, H9806.

[27]Moore, "Historical Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 42; Spence, Adam to E. M. Cravath, May 8, 1871, AMAA, H9714.

[28]This chapter does not intend to provide a narrative of the singers' tour, but rather, a qualitative analysis of the ways in which they were received and debated by white audiences in the popular press. Those interested in a rigorously detailed narrative account should seek out Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*.

[29]White, George to E. M. Cravath, Nov. 26, 1871, AMAA, 116517; White, George to E. M. Cravath, Feb. 16, 1872, AMAA, 12744.

[30]Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 146, 111.

[31]"Fisk University. Statement" (1873), JSS 1873–1874. The statement commemorated and summarized the chorus's ambitions for its first tour.

[32]Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 75.

[33]*Leviticus* 25:10. "The Old Testament 'year of jubilee' had always been the favorite figure of speech into which they slaves put their prayers and hopes for emancipation. The year of jubilee had come—this little band of singers was a witness to it, and outgrowth of this." Marsh, *Story of the Jubilee Singers*, 26.

[34]White, George to E. M. Cravath, Nov. 26, 1871, AMAA, 116517.

[35]Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 51.

[36]Moore, "Historical Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 47.

[37]C. P., "The Jubilee Singers," *Waterbury Daily American*, Feb. 6, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; "The 'Jubilee Singers,'" *New York Tribune*, Dec. 28, 1871, JSS 1867–1872.

[38]"Amusements," *Detroit Tribune*, May 31, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; "A Novel Service. A Colored Choir from Fisk University, Nashville, at Plymouth Church—'Songs of Zion' as Sung by the Slaves in the South," *Cleveland Herald*, Nov. 13, 1871, 1867–1872; Goodrich, quoted in *Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, (Nashville, Tenn.) Under the Auspices of the American Missionary Association*, ed. Theodore Seward (New York: Biglow & Main, 1872), 32; L., "The Jubilee Singers, letter to the editor, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Mar. 31, 1872, JSS 1867–1872."

[39]Moore, "Historical Sketch," *Fisk University News*, 47–48; Taylor, "Reminiscences," *Fisk University News*, 29–30.

[40]"Amusements," *Detroit Tribune*, May 31, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; Cuyler, "Our Native Music," *New York Tribune*; "Jubilee Singers Correspondence between Rev. Henry Ward Beecher and the Rev. Henry Allon, D.D." (pamphlet 1873), JSS 1867–1872; L., "The Jubilee Singers," letter to the editor, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Mar. 31, 1872, JSS 1867–1872.

[41]"Music," *The Atlantic Monthly* 1 (Nov. 1857), 125; Paul Fritz Laubenstein, "Race Values in Aframerican Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 1:3 (July 1930): 378.

[42]Cruz, *Culture on the Margins*, 116, 130. John Cox finds this sentiment emerging as early as the wartime years: "Confronted with the breakup of their nation, Union soldiers used their narratives to see the reincorporation of the South into the national community and to identify and celebrate those aspects of the region that they found most 'American.'" Cox, *Traveling South*, 67.

[43]Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009 [1852]), 235.

[44]"Music Extraordinary. Jubilee Concert of ex-Slaves at the First Congregational Church," *Newark Evening Courier*, Jan. 17, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; "The Fisk Concert," *Cincinnati Gazette*, Oct. 18, 1871, JSS 1867–1872; "The Jubilee Singers," *Brooklyn Herald*, Dec. 28, 1871, JSS 1867–1872; Theodore L. Cuyler, "Our Native Music—The Jubilee Singers," letter to the editor, *New York Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1872, JSS 1867–1872.

[45]"Concert at the New England Church," *Brooklyn Times*, quoted in the *American Missionary*, n.d., JSS 1867–1872; Theodore L. Cuyler, "Our Native Music—The Jubilee Singers," letter to the editor, *New York Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; Theodore F. Seward (1872), quoted in "The Jubilee Singers.

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Ex-Slave Students of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, Will Give a Service of Song Under Distinguished Patronage, in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on Tuesday, January 13th" (1874), JSS 1873–1874.

[46]"Negro Folk Song. Slave Melodies of the South.—The Jubilee and Hampton Singers," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 32:26 (Apr. 5, 1873): 412, 411. *Dwight's Journal of Music* had long positioned itself as an arbiter of musical taste and throughout its run in the middle-nineteenth century painted a portrait of white critics' visions of African American music as consisting of, among other things, "novelty and pathetic sentiment" and an "effectiveness" born of African influence. Thomas Riis, "The Cultivated White Tradition and Black Music in Nineteenth-Century America: A Discussion of Some Articles in *J. S. Dwight's Journal of Music*," *Black Music in Perspective* 42:3 (Jul. 1976): 175.

[47]Joseph Robert Moreau, "Schoolbook Nation: Imagining the American Community in United States History Texts for Grammar and Secondary Schools, 1865–1930" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 40; Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 221. See also Cruz, *Culture on the Margins*; Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973); and Radano, "Denoting Difference," *Critical Inquiry*.

[48]Mary McAleer Balkun, *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[49]"The Fisk University Concert," *Cincinnati Gazette*, Oct. 18, 1871, JSS 1867–1872; "Concert at the Tabernacle," *Brooklyn Union*, Jan. 2, 1872, JSS 1867–1872; "The Jubilee Singers," *New York Musical Gazette*, April 1872, JSS 1867–1872.

[50]C. P., "The Jubilee Singers," *Waterbury Daily American*. For memories from soldiers and abolitionists, see Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 89.

[51]"Music Extraordinary," *Newark Evening Courier*.

[52]Cuyler, "Our Native Music," *New York Tribune*.

[53]Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 88.

[54]"Music Extraordinary," *Newark Evening Courier*.

[55]Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1993), 25; Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 98.

[56]"The Jubilee Singers Last Night," *New Haven Daily Palladium*; "Amusements. The Jubilee Singers," *Syracuse Journal*; C. P., "The Jubilee Singers," *Waterbury Daily American*.

[57]Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 190, 167.

[58]*Jubilee Songs*, 11, 13; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 53.

[59]Ibid., 29–30.

[60]*Jubilee Songs*, 27.

[61]Lovell, *Black Song*, 223, 252. See also Daphne Brooks's discussion of the twenty-four verse "Go Down, Moses" in Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 308.

[62]"Jubilee Singers' Concert," n.t., Nov. 12, 1872, JSS 1867–1872.

[63]See, for instance, White, George to E. M. Cravath, Feb. 9, 1872, AMAA, 12731; and Graham, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers," 379.

[64]Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 5.

[65]William Wells Brown, *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1863), 32, 33, 49.

[66]Pike, *Jubilee Singers*, 47–48.

[67]John G. Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man: Changing Concepts of Success in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965); Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New York: The Free Press, 1954); Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1993 [1791]); Douglass, *Narrative*.

[68]Diary of Ella Sheppard, Nov. 1874, Jubilee Singers Archives, Archival and Manuscript Collections, the John Hope and Aurelia Elizabeth Franklin Library, Fisk University (hereafter, JSA); White, George to E. M Cravath, Dec. 16, 1872, AMAA. While Shepard does not provide the day for her recording, it appears on pages between entries for Dec. 13 and 17. This is further supported by the date affixed to White's letter.

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[69]"The Jubilee Singers, Before Lawrence's Old Residents," *Daily American*, October 22, 1879, JSS 1879–1881; "The Fisk Jubilee Singers," *Hartford Daily Times*, Feb. 7, 1880, JSS 1879–1881.

[70]Crosthwaite, "Résumé," *Fisk University News*, 6–10; Thomas Rutling, "My Life Since Leaving the Jubilee Singers, *Fisk University News: The Jubilee Singers* 2:5 (Oct. 1911): 36–37; Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus,"* 183.

[71]Ella Sheppard Moore, *Before Emancipation* (New York: American Missionary Association, n.d.), JSV, box 3, folder 6.

[72]Ibid., 4.

[73]Ibid., 6. As Wheatley wrote, "'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,/Taught my benighted soul to understand/That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too./Once I redemption neither sought nor knew./Some view our sable race with scornful eye;/'Their colour is a diabolic dye.'/Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain/May be refined, as join the angelic train." Phyllis Wheatley, quoted in Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 45.

[74]Moore, *Before Emancipation*, 8.

[75]Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), ch. 3.

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