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Dark Town's Wealth: A 150-Year-Old Rock-and-Roll Concert Review

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Dark Town's Wealth: A 150-Year-Old Rock-and-Roll Concert Review

Abstract

I have a lot of odd things scattered around my house, weird ephemera and bric-a-brac that I've picked up here and there as I've studied history.

Some of them are treasures, like CDVs of long-dead College professors and original pieces of decking from the USS North Carolina. Some are less treasures and more, well, junk. Most folks toss old newspapers within a few days of reading. In the Civil War Era, I'm sure many a page of newsprint went to start an honest mother's hearth in the morning or a pile of moist kindling in some godforsaken camp. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies

Disciplines

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Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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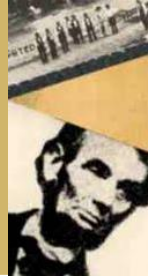
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Dark Town's Wealth: A 150-Year-Old Rock-and-Roll Concert Review

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2013

I have a lot of odd things scattered around my house, weird ephemera and bric-a-brac that I've picked up here and there as I've studied history.

Some of them are treasures, like CDVs of long-dead College professors and original pieces of decking from the USS North Carolina. Some are less treasures and more, well, junk. Most folks toss old newspapers within a few days of reading. In the Civil War Era, I'm sure many a page of newsprint went to start an honest mother's hearth in the morning or a pile of moist kindling in some godforsaken camp.

But I've accumulated some of those scraps of newspaper that didn't end up in a campfire or under a cooking pot. I love reading them. To flip open, sometimes quite literally, the pages of the past is an amazing feeling.

In New York, 150 years ago this morning, newsprint was still drying on a page I hold in my hand today. And the news was fit to print and, more importantly, fit to be read. Filling the front page of the *New York Tribune* that April the 11th was news of Charleston Harbor. Inside the editor recalled that, "it is the anniversary of the attack on Sumter - two years today since the Rebellion broke into open War." Those two years had been, "crowded with events, brilliant with victories and saddened by defeats, but ennobled throughout by a fortitude which no suffering could weaken, and a determination which no disaster has been able to shake."



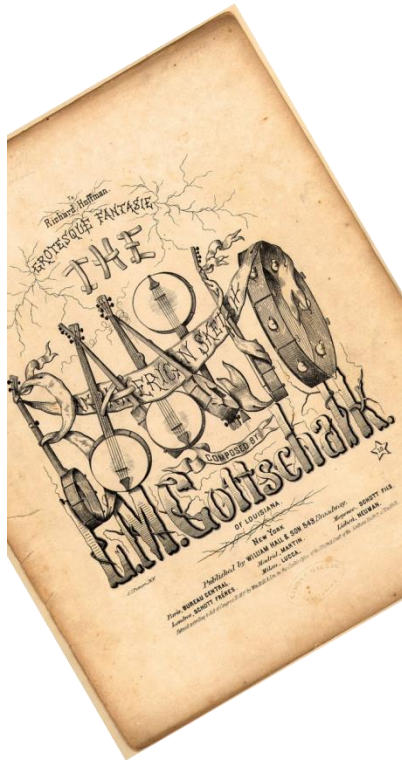
Reading history.

The war continued.

And so did life. New York, as she always is, was abuzz with culture. In a tiny piece in a far right column of one page, the *Tribune* reported on a concert in Irving Hall, in the neighborhood of Union Square. "Mr. Gottschalk, whose name is talismanic to draw crowds of admirers, has been giving two concerts this week, to brilliant audiences," the paper crowed. And tonight would be no different, as he showed once again, "the taste and skill which have made him equally renowned in Europe and America."

If ever there was a quintessentially American product in the 19th century, it was Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Born in New Orleans in 1829 to a Jewish businessman and a Creole mother, Gottschalk grew up in a largely integrated family in a largely integrated city. The household even included

Gottschalk's mulatto brothers and sister, the product of a series of encounters his father had with a mistress of another race.



New Orleans, that odd amalgam of cultures which seep together, ebb and flow, oozed its way into Louis Gottschalk's soul. And those cultures oozed out once again as his fingers touched the ivory keys of his beloved piano. Where Europe had piano virtuoso Frédéric Chopin, whose work mirrored his classical roots and mimicked Bach and Beethoven, America got music from Gottschalk's fingers that was an offspring of our weird cultural mix. Part a product of the independent spirit of the nation, part borrowing, stealing and lovingly appropriating the black rhythms and culture in which he was brought up, Gottschalk's image of classical piano was decidedly bent.

Syncopation, atonal pairings of chords, crazy grace-notes and quick staccato moving lines all suited Gottschalk. He was shifting music, injecting a new soul of black folk where there had been an absence before.

In his *Bamboula (Danse des nègres)*, Gottschalk literally injected the black musical voice into American (and world) musical vernacular. In doing so, Gottschalk set America on a path to Jimi Hendrix.

From Gottschalk's ivories, quite obvious when you listen to any of his pieces played today, was born nearly fully-formed that quintessential of American musics, ragtime, and its king, Scott Joplin. And from Joplin and the commercialization machine of Tin Pan Alley, America found a new taste in rhythm, where driving beats, quick tempos and jarring syncopation were commonplace. Gottschalk beget Joplin. Joplin beget Ragtime. Ragtime beget Jazz. Jazz beget that strong rhythm section and those chord progressions we still hear infesting our radios today. Add in a dose of folk and hillbilly guitar to the mix, stir, and Rock-and-Roll isn't far off. Without Gottschalk there is no Elvis Presley. There is no Chuck Berry. There is no Motown. And there is no Jimi Hendrix, shredding on a guitar on *Purple Haze* to a driving back-beat to which Gottschalk himself could have jammed right along.

So my newspaper isn't just a relic of the past. It's one of the very first Rock-and-Roll concert reviews. Louis Gottschalk beget the musical world we live in today.

Whether Gottschalk played [Bamboula](#) or not, the paper doesn't say. It doesn't record whether or not [The Banjo](#) was on his set list. We don't know what he played. But we know that in a crowded music hall just a few blocks off of Union Square Park, Rock-and-Roll *was* played, 150 years ago tonight.

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forcibly the strides of American musical art to see
the most admired vocalist, Miss Adeline Patti, and
the most admired pianist, Mr. Gottschalk, both of
native birth.

NEW-YORK