

University of Nebraska - Lincoln  
**DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln**

---

Faculty Publications: School of Music

Music, School of

---

11-2-2018

## Will Marion Cook: Threads and Themes

Peter M. Lefferts

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [American Popular Culture Commons](#), and the [Music Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Music, School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications: School of Music by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**11/02/2018**

## **Will Marion Cook: Threads and Themes**

This document is a supplement to "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Marion Cook," a 2017 document which is mounted on-line at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/66/>. It draws out of that resource some material on five themes or threads that are constant elements over Cook's career, concerning the history of African American music and dance, and the promotion of schools and professional troupes for African American musicians and actors. Occasionally there is more information below than in the 2017 document, but readers are cautioned that more often, the older document will have additional detail not simply cut and pasted here. This re-assembling by theme or thread is not a finished, polished effort; it represents work in progress, complete with repetitions, missing data, and the occasional typographical error. I invite queries, amplifications, and corrections, which may be directed to plefferts1@unl.edu. The present document is a first draft of November 2018.

1. Cook and Education.
2. Cook in Print as an Authority on the History of African American Music and Musicians.
3. Cook and Didactic Programming.
4. Cook and the Promotion of Schools for the Training of African American Students in Theater and Music.
5. Cook and the Institutional Promotion of African American Theater.

## 1. Cook and Education

(NB: This section is particularly dependent upon the "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Marion Cook," mentioned above, for documentation and amplification.)

Education was an important career-long preoccupation for Will Marion Cook.

Cook himself was educated in the Washington, DC and Oberlin, Ohio public schools, and at Oberlin Conservatory, then in Germany at the Royal Academy of Music in Berlin, then briefly at the Seventh Day Adventist college in Battle Creek, then at the National Conservatory in New York City. However, he never earned a high school or college diploma, although very many of his family members completed college, some earning advanced degrees, including his parents, step-father, brothers, children, nieces and nephews, and grandchildren. Further, many of them became educators, as spelled out below.

The educated African American (whether male or female), coming home from college to the family and finding themselves alienated from those they had left behind, is a plot point at the heart of his two earliest documented musicals--- Cannibal King and Clorindy.

Cook's father (BA, MM) and mother (BA) were both educated at Oberlin. His father taught school briefly, and then earned a law degree and taught at Howard. Cook's stepfather was an MD. His mother had an Oberlin degree, taught public school in Kansas City, and taught at Howard. His father's sister, Miss Lucinda ("Mickie") Cook, taught school and then was a member of the faculty of the State N. and I. department of Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio, and an instructor and director of "Elementary Training."

Older brother John did his high schooling at Oberlin Prep, then earned his bachelor's degree and a pharmacy degree at Howard. Younger brother Oliver was a graduate of Cornell and was a high school math teacher and high school principal in Kansas City.

NB: Oberlin graduates loom especially large not just in his family, but also within his circle in Washington, D.C. from the 1890s to the 1920s.

Howard University not only looms very large in the lives of his parents, but Cook himself may have taught at Howard in some informal capacity in the 1890s.

The children and grandchildren of Cook's generation were college educated and become teachers. Son Mercer was educated at Amherst, the Sorbonne, and Brown and was a highly successful and productive academic and diplomat. Mercer's two sons, Cook's grandsons, were educated at Amherst. Nephew Lenoir was educated at Dartmouth and taught college. Niece Louise was educated at Radcliffe, taught high school, and married a college professor. Granddaughter Marion was educated at Spelman.

Will Marion Cook, who had experience in two university-level conservatory environments, in Berlin and New York, pressed for---and announced fund-raising efforts on behalf of---a National Conservatory for Negroes for many decades. See Section 4 of this document, below.

-----

Cook as teacher:

1892: Cook taught violin to the young Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960) in Washington, DC at some point before White, who studied at Howard in 1894-1895, went to Oberlin (1896-1901). By one report, this was when White was age 8, thus immediately upon Cook's return from Berlin to the US. If Clarence Cameron White's anecdote about studying with Cook in Washington in the summer before he turned 12 is correct, that would be in the summer of 1892. The best bet is that White studied with young hot shot Cook when Cook was around DC in 1889-1891, or when Cook was back in town for the summer of 1892.

White reminisces four decades later that he came to Washington when he was about eleven years old and met Cook, who gave him violin lessons in the summer; these ended when Cook left Washington, when White was not quite 12 years old---that would be 1892, when White turned 12 on August 10, 1892.

(Washington Evening Star, May 28, 1933, p. 38; see also Wikipedia citation of this anecdote).

1895, in December: "Prof. Wm. M. Cook" gives a lecture under the auspices of the Bethel Literary Society at the Fifteenth Street Baptist Church in DC on "Music Under Four Eminent Masters," i.e., Schubert, Beethoven, Wagner, Dvorak, with the assistance of Harry Burleigh and Mrs. Alice Strange Davis (Washington Evening Star, December 5, 1895, p. 8)

1897: Will Marion Cook was a candidate for musical director in the (colored) public schools of Washington, DC in 1897. There are various twists and turns to this story that unfold at least through a March 1898 brouhaha over a fishy appointment in the DC schools.

1897: In a newspaper article concerning a Cook attack upon the appointment of Sterling M. Brown (sr.) as a Howard trustee, Cook was identified as Prof. William M. Cook of Howard University (Washington Evening Star, October 4, 1897, p. 2); then Prof. George William Cook of Howard wrote the Evening Star to say, first, that he was not the person mentioned, and second, that there is no Prof. Wm. M. Cook in Howard University, to which the paper responded that they identified him exactly as he "was introduced by the chairman of the introduction committee" at the occasion where Cook spoke (Washington Evening Star, October 9, 1897, p. 3).

1897, in December: At the very end of 1897 Cook is recognized in a short list of those who are great music educators in DC.

1910 After a gap of over a decade spent pretty exclusively in musical theatre (1898-1909), Cook re-establishes contact with education, in a sense, when he starts a music school in NYC with Harry Burleigh in 1910, presumably with advance planning in later 1909 or before.

1910s: He is a steadfast supporter of the Music School Settlement in Harlem (to which he sent his son Mercer, and for which he participated in several benefit concerts), and he was an advocate for a national conservatory for African Americans. See below.

1920s: He is a constant advocate for a national school to train black actors and musicians. See below. Over the middle years of the 1920s, Cook produced benefit concerts for a **Negro Folk Music and Drama Society or Negro Folk Theatre Association** (1923-1924 season, in January

1924), a **Negro Art School or Negro School of Music** (1925-1926 season, in January 1926), and a **Negro School of Dramatic and Musical Art** (1926-1927 season, in December 1926). He is identified as the director or head of the latter organization.

1950: A scholarship fund was set up in Cook's name for the Metropolitan Music School a few years after his death. (NB: The Metropolitan Music School of New York City was established in 1935 with an interracial faculty and student body.)

## 2. Will Marion Cook in Print as an Authority on the History of African American Music and Musicians

Cook is "the greatest champion of the race in folklore songs" (Cary B. Lewis in the Chicago Defender [1915])

### **Cook's statements on the development of Negro music:**

In the later 1890s Cook wrote an essay on the history of African-American music and musicians that remained a blueprint for him over many decades. The original 1898 version of Cook's essay appeared in The Prospect, April 1898, and was reprinted in the Springfield (Ill.) Illinois Record, May 14, 1898, pp. 1, 4.

A revised 1915 version appeared in the Chicago Defender, May 1, 1915, p. 6, where it was presented in the context of an interview under the by-line of columnist Cary B. Lewis.

A third version of this material appeared in 1918 in the NY Age, September 21, 1918, p. 6.

Cook's material is quoted with acknowledgement in Monroe N. Work, ed., Negro Yearbook, an Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro 1921-1922, 6th ed. (Tuskegee, Ala.: Negro Yearbook Company, 1922), p. 285; possibly even more of the text in this source draws on Cook, if it is not, in fact, the work of Cook himself. There are later editions that repeat the text, e.g., the editions of 1925-1926 (p. 343), of 1937 (p. 480), etc.

Underlying Clarence Cameron White's "The Musical Genius of the American Negro" (The Etude, May 1924) is a similar scheme. Maud Cuney-Hare follows Cook's broad outline chapter by chapter in her Negro Musicians and their Music (1936). And Alain Locke, who was very close to Cook in the 1930s, proposes something very like Cook's scheme in The Negro and His Music (1936), p. 11.

## 1898 Version

From The Prospect, I/1, April 1898, as reprinted in the Springfield (Ill.) Illinois Record, May 14, 1898, pp. 1, 4:

### MUSIC OF THE NEGRO/

Prof. Will M. Cook Writes of its Past, Present and Future./

The Charm of the Slave Songs Lay in their Pathos, and from their Melodies will be Developed Music Which Will be Truly American./

(The Prospect)

Has the Negro degenerated musically? What else will account for such ephemeral claptrap compositions as "The New Bully," [Theo. F. Morse, 1896; sung by May Irwin] "A Hot Time in the Old Town," [Metz and Hayden, 1896] "All Coons Look Alike to Me," [1896] etc.? Were not musicians, after listening to such soul-stirring melodies as "Steal Away," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," etc., led to believe that from this despised race had sprung a fountain of lyric genius destined to overflow and refresh the entire tone world? The critics, overjoyed at finding evidences of musical genius in this strange and unexpected quarter, studied carefully the beautiful songs of the black slave, and eagerly await some masterpiece of tonal beauty the heralding of which has been so clearly heard. They were disappointed. The melodies of the slave have sunk into the rubbish of the popular "coon" songs. Rags, they are called, and ragged, indeed, they are in construction and finish. Why is this? Has the Negro, in laying aside the chains which bound him down to a miserable servitude, laid aside also the genius which brought forth precious songs--- songs which crept into your heart, and as the pain, and misery, and hopelessness became unbearable, caused you too to cry, "O Lord, how long?"

Will a study of this race, its peculiarities, its virtues and its defects prove degeneration? Let us see. From what source did the Negro slave draw his inspiration? The whole musical world has studied this problem, and theories as multitudinous as those for the solution of the problem of perpetual motion, as intricate as the doctrines of the Mahatmas have been advanced. Yet, does one wonder that the Italians, under the bluest of skies lulled by balmy winds, warmed by the Southern sun, inspired by the glances of adorable women, have sung such soft, sensuous, passionate melodies that as you listen, you sink entranced into a new world---a world of beauty, of pleasure and of love? Does



one marvel because Norway, the land of snows, of yawning chasms and lofty peaks, produced its Grieg, who from the wild, weird, unformed folk-song of his people, constructed musical edifices as rugged as chaste and as grand as the rocks from which they sprung? Then why wonder that the Negro, born in a land where nature with lavish generosity has beautified the earth till she herself stood astonished at such profusion, where birds and trees and flowers produce one interminable symphony of sound and color, should sing as lightly and carelessly as the birds themselves? Why wonder that these people, when brought to a strange land, where cold was felt for the first time, where the blows of the lash, instead of the clapping of hands marked the rhythm, should xxx out their anguish in mournful xxx. Why wonder that even in xxxxx of rejoicing there stole, now and then, a note of sadness which spoke of the overflowing heart---the tortured body, the agonized spirit?

The Negro's musical genius, making allowance for the above causes and effects, is traceable directly to African tribes. There the spirit of melody and rhythm is just as pronounced, the only difference being in the form, an advantage the American Negro owes to association with the English, Scotch, Irish and French immigrants. The American folk song xx owe much of their coloring to the xxx influence. A study of the Creole songs of Louisiana will show a tendency toward the French chanson; the slave songs of the Carolinas toward the Scots xxx above all they are Negro and only Negroes could have produced them.

The Negro has in no sense degenerated, and least of all has he degenerated musically. The Negro is essentially an imitative creature, and to this trait---half virtue, half vice---we owe the principal faults of his present compositions. To "The New Bully," a song composed by, and was popular among the roustabouts of the Mississippi, and finally appropriated and published by an enterprising comedienne, we owe the epidemic in so-called Negro songs. One special characteristic of these songs is the much advertised "rag" accompaniment, the origin and character of which will be discussed later on in this article.

The charm and attractiveness of the slave songs lay in their individuality and pathos (sic). In a certain sense the Negroes of today have lost these characteristics from their music. They have heard too much; they have too quickly and too thoroughly absorbed the beautiful in other music. One has but to divest "The New Bully" of its syncopated notes, and play it in moderate time, when it will become a very singable Italian melody, thus showing easily what influence was at work in its composition. "All Coons Look Alike to Me," divested of its "rags," also proves that some Negro, having heard strains from

*Lucia* or *Traviata*, was attempting to make all songs sound alike to him, barring a slight poverty of dress. Thus he has momentarily thrown aside his original, peculiar, melodic and harmonic effects for the more conventional ones of the Italians.

The "rag" accompaniment, about which so much has been written, and so many views have been advanced, until a very simple problem has been turned and twisted into a very difficult one, is nothing more or less than a constant, even bass chord accompaniment in the left hand against a charming and syncopated thematic development in the right.

This is varied now and then by diatonic progressions in the bass, forming thereby a very interesting and acceptable bit of counterpoint. A figure from the song, "I Guess Dat'll Hol' You fu' Awhile," gives a very good illustration.

This kind of movement, which was unknown until about fifteen years ago, grew out of the visits of Negro sailors to Asiatic ports, and particularly to those of Turkey, where the odd rhythm of the *danse du ventre* music soon forced itself upon them; and in trying to reproduce this they have worked out the "rag."

During the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago the "Midway Plaisance" was well filled with places of amusement where the peculiar music of the "muscle dance" was continually heard, and it is worthy of note that after that time the popularity of the "rag" grew with astonishing rapidity and became general among Negro pianists. The "rag" is unscientific and unmusical, and has nothing to recommend it except its odd rhythm. It will be extremely short-lived. Already its popularity has begun to decline, and in a few years "rag time" will be a thing of the past.

Among the Negroes who have shown by their compositions evidences of great talent are Gussie L. Davis, the composer of over seven hundred popular songs, some of which, "The Maple on the Hill," "The Lighthouse by the Sea," and "The Baggage Coach Ahead," made fortunes for the publishers; James Bland, author of "Dem Golden Slippers" and other minstrel songs; Bert Williams, whose "Dora Dean" is one of the real Negro songs written today; and Bob Cole, a Negro song writer who has also remarkable dramatic ability.

Dvorak, with his great symphony "*Aus der Nuen Welt*," (sic) threw a bomb into the ranks of the musical critics of the Western Hemisphere when he said: "From the melodies of the American slave there will be developed music which will be truly national---truly American." Dvorak stopped a little short of a complete victory. With his intimate knowledge of Negroes and their music (knowledge gained by careful observation and study) he might have added,

"And from the Negroes themselves must come the National music." This is proved by Dvorak's great triumph which was, paradoxically a failure. Perfect as were his reproductions of the slave themes, true as were the melodic and harmonic contrasts, faithful as was his insight into the character of the Negro--now light, now heavy, now gay, now sad---yet something lacked; and that something, which even Dvorak's great genius failed to comprehend, and only a Negro who had seen [p. 4] and felt and suffered could supply. A glance at the quotations which appear above, the one from "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and the other the second theme from the first movement of Dvorak's Negro Symphony, will show how careful was the composer to adhere even in the slightest details to Negro character.

The impetus given to music by this great master has been felt everywhere, and particularly by Negroes. Results have been instantaneous and many. S. Coleridge Taylor a young African living in London and a graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music, has attracted considerable attention by his "African Romances," a musical setting of some of Paul Laurence Dunbar's verses.

A still broader musician is Harry T. Burleigh, a young Negro living in New York, and a pupil of Dvorak, who, in "Songs from a Sunny Land," has given us some lyric gems. His harmonization of "John's Gwine Down on the de Island in the Mawnin," an old slave melody, is a masterpiece of contrapuntal dexterity.

There are others of lesser note whose names might be cited to prove that the Negroes are forging their way to the front. They have learned that the true road to success is through knowledge of musical classics. They are living with Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Wagner, and are learning to speak broadly, daringly and triumphantly.

And who knows? Soon perhaps will some native composer, hopeful of the future, take the pen, and inspired by long repressed imagination, paint flowing tone pictures of a radiant dawn---a dawn without a passing---a day without a night.

## 1915 Version

Chicago Defender, May 1, 1915, p. 6; presented as an interview appearing under the by-line of columnist Cary B. Lewis:

WM. MARION COOK CHAMPION OF FOLK LORE SONG/

Eminent Composer and Orchestra Director Interviewed by Defender Reporter---Noted Musician Gives History of Racial Music from 1619 to Present Day---Jubilee Songs Triumphant Success/

PRAISES HARRY BURLEIGH/

Race Gaining Real Culture and Beginning to Glory in Their Unmatched Heritage in Folklore Songs---Stopped at "Y"---Too Ill to Appear at Concert in Orchestra Hall---An Afro-American Beethoven Should Appear.

By Cary B. Lewis

Will Marion Cook, the greatest champion of the race in folklore songs, was in the city last week and stopped at the Wabash Y.M.C.A. This noted genius was to have appeared at the "All Colored Concert" at Orchestra Hall but owing to a physical breakdown had to return to his mother at Washington, D. C., the city of his birth. For a number of years Mr. Cook has lived in New York City and here he has labored in the musical world. His songs, for the most part racial, have been sung up and down Broadway with wonderful success. He has put more talented members of the race on the road than any of our musicians, namely: Roland Hayes, Abbie Mitchell, Harry Burleigh, Melville Charleton, and others of this character. Mr. Cook's forte is chorus directing. It is in this particular that made him famous by directing the world renowned Williams and Walker Company.

His genius, however, is known for his folklore compositions. Musical critics here and abroad claim that Mr. Cook has out classed all other composers of this character. Some of his biggest songs are "Springtime," "My Lady," "Lover's Lane," "My Love is in de Sky 'Wid de Moon," "Exhortation," "Rain Song," "Swing Along," "My Lady's Lips." These are the numbers that stamped his individuality and ranked him as the champion of racial composers. A score of his compositions are among the incidental music in the

shows of the race that have appeared in the last twenty-five years.

All the great singers of the race that have become successful used compositions from Will Marion Cook. His success as a director and composer of both the orchestra and the chorus and in developing of talented individuals is widely known both in this country and abroad. Chicagoans greatly regretted to learn of his serious illness last Thursday and hope he will be able soon to be at his desk to carry on the work which he has so nobly and ably begun.

Speaking of "Afro-American music and musicians," he said:

**The Beginning---1619-1850.**

The songs of sorrow, of joy, of humor, and sentiment, were the natural growth of a race, musically inclined, in Africa, and whose melodious outpourings were intensified by the conditions of slavery.

1850-1865. Minstrel songs full of character, but less lofty of sentiment and less true of real Negro aspiration and inspiration. (See songs of Jim Bland and others.)

1870. Advent of jubilee singers---an artistic triumph.

1875 to 1888. No further development in Negro music. Cause: the Afro-American had been so thoroughly taught by the American white man that his color, condition and accomplishment were inferior, that the younger generation at once threw aside all tradition. Any reference to the past became a disgrace. Except in a few schools of the south, to sing jubilee melodies to an Afro-American audience would be an insult, and would lead to the dismissal of teacher urging them. The Moody and Sankey hymns were used exclusively in our churches and schools---the glorious old slave hymns and spirituals frowned upon as "reminding us of a past full of shame and misery." (This is quoted from the protest of a prominent music teacher twenty years ago in the city of Washington.) Talented Negroes sought in their musical study to eradicate all traces of that individual character that had attracted the attention of the world. Result, milk and water imitations of inferior white musicians.

**Beginning of Ragtime.**

About 1888. The starting and quick growth of so-called "ragtime." As far back as 1875, Negroes in the questionable resorts along the Mississippi had commenced to evolve this musical figure, but at the World's Fair, Chicago, "ragtime" got a running start, swept the Americas, then Europe, and today the craze has not diminished.

Cause of Success: The public was tired of the sing song, samey, monotonous, mother, sister, father sentimental songs. Ragtime offered unique rhythms, curious groupings of words, and melodies that gave the zest of

unexpectedness. Many Negroes, Irving Jones, Will Accooe, Bob Cole, Johnson brothers, Gussie L. Davis, Sid Perrin, Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker and others wrote some of the most celebrated rag songs of the day. In other instances white actors and song writers would hear in St. Louis such melodies as "New Bully," "Hot Time," etc., would change the words (often unprintable) and publish them as their own creations. At this time came Dvorak. He saw that from this people, even though their material had been debased, must come a great school of music---not necessarily national---but rather new and characteristic. The renaissance in Negro music. A few earnest Negro music students felt as did Dvorak. They studied the man---so broad, genial, and human---carefully and thoroughly.

### **Harry Burleigh's Work.**

Some Negroes of real musical accomplishment---Harry T. Burleigh, a pupil of Dvorak, is baritone soloist at St. George's Church, New York City, and sings in the choir of the Jewish Temple, 44th street and Fifth avenue. He is musical editor at Ricordi's, the leading operatic publishing house of the world. Mr. Burleigh's songs are published by Ricordi and Schirmer, the leading publishers of America.

Nathaniel Dett, a very young man, recently from Oberlin School of Music, and now director at Hampton, has in his developed "Listen to the Lambs," published by Schirmer, proven his right to be taken seriously by the musical public. Carl Diton, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, a student for two years in Germany, now teacher in Atlanta, Ga., is a thorough master of the science of music. Melville Charlton, both because of temperament and technique, is considered as ranking with the first organists of New York City.

Last, but greater than all of these, I must name a comedian, not a musician, George W. Walker, the late lamented partner of Bert Williams. His has been the greatest influence in the development of modern Negro music. At 28 he could not read a note and could hardly write his name, yet day and night he talked Negro music to his people, urged and compelled his writers to give something characteristic. Each year he wanted bigger, better things. He engaged the best Negro voices in the United States, and their success in ensemble singing was as great in London, Paris and Berlin as in New York, Boston and Chicago. (See criticisms of "In Dahomey," "Bandanna Land," "Abyssinia.") Dvorak would have been proud to have known such a man. In all reverence---Dvorak-George Walker. They had high ideals and they showed the way. Perhaps in a vast hereafter these two men may meet. The rough, uncouth, but genial Bohemian master; the uneducated but highly polished

ebony-hued African with the gleaming ivory mouth. Do you doubt that with one impulse their hands will join and the mastiff-like smile of the Bohemian will match the lazy grin of the American "Zulu" as they both whisper one word: "brother."

### **Race Music in America.**

Today. Developed Negro music has just begun in America. The Afro-American is finding himself. He has thrown aside puerile imitations of the white man. He has learned that a thorough knowledge of the masters gives the knowledge of what is good and how to create. From the Russian, he has learned to get his inspiration from within; that his inexhaustible wealth of folklore legends and songs furnish him with material for compositions that will establish a great school of music and enrich musical literature.

The Menace. The Afro-American wants results quickly. He does not believe in making haste slowly. He quickly turns to false white and colored friends, who wish to exploit him for ulterior motives. The political "carpet bagger" of '68 and '72 has his prototype in the musical "carpet bagger" of 1915. Dvorak, Safonoff, Hirsch and other great European directors and composers; De Pachman, D'Albert, Paderewski, as well as many great singers, have told of the coming glory of the Negro musician. It is becoming a fad.

In some of the large cities of the country, New York in particular, well meaning but ill advised white people are gathering together large choruses of poorly trained singers, without education either musical or general, and, in conjunction with unschooled instrumentalists, are giving widely advertised concerts, claiming to represent the accomplishment of an entire race. They promise much---fulfill little. Let them rather show what their particular school is doing and, with success or failure, no harm is done.

There is still an element of doubt in the mind of the cultured American. He says: "We concede the Negro's talent for music; we doubt his capacity for thorough development."

The right way. What the Afro-American has thus far accomplished is only a promise---an expectation; the realization belongs to the future. A school must, and will, be established, perhaps at Washington, D. C. To head this school, an eminent European composer and teacher secured (preferably a Russian) who, unhindered by prejudice, will understand, appreciate, and foster the peculiar musical genius of the Afro-American child. While giving the child the same grasp upon the science of composition as was Beethoven's he will also show that strength of character and profound knowledge of his people, as well as technical skill, made Beethoven the master.

### **Individuality, and Then More Individuality.**

Such a school will require money. It will not be forthcoming if, as soon as a few Negroes have learned the first principles of breathing, or being able to play the scale of G one or two octaves without serious offense to tonality, they are at once exploited in some temple of music, where, may be, the Boston Symphony Orchestra had just finished a concert, perfect in every detail.

The Negro composer (and there are a few in the United States who are receiving serious consideration) should mainly find his inspiration in the imperishable melodies of his enslaved ancestors. When he shall have developed works worthy of rendition he will find both Negroes and whites ready and willing to offer them. All through the South, Southwest, and West there are Negroes with beautiful voices. What is more, because of the home life of these people they are gaining real culture. They are laying aside their shame of the past, and are beginning to glory in their unmatched heritage folklore and folk songs. The "Afro-American Folk Singers," Washington, D. C., the chorus at Howard University, and others, are ready to do justice to the choral works of a Negro Beethoven, should he appear. See note below. To them we look for results, by them would we be judged. New York and other large cities of the North are neither seeking nor finding "the right way."

Continuing, he said: "I do not mention Hampton, where they sing the primitive slave melodies so beautifully, for this reason: To sing works of development to which the composer gave thought and culture requires thought and culture. If you, admitting an inferior condition, fail to give to the child opportunity for breadth, which only come from comprehensive development, just so far you have hindered his understanding, appreciation and rendition of all masterpieces."



## 1918 Version

NY Age, Saturday, September 21, 1918, p. 6:

### WILL MARION COOK ON NEGRO MUSIC

By Will Marion Cook

Negro music is on the ascendancy. However, the height it is to reach within the next few years depends largely on the efforts of our colored musicians in the United States to bring this distinctive type of American music prominently before the public.

It is, therefore, due to the full realization of the important part the colored musician must play at this time in aiding Negro music on its upward flight that I have become directly and enthusiastically interested in the proposed tour of the New York Clef Club Orchestra in November, which will be undertaken for the express purpose of fostering and developing the best Negro music.

The plan now being worked out will be to present sixty efficient instrumentalists and singers from the old spirituals to the standard works of modern Negro composers. While the tour will be under my musical direction I will be assisted by such promising musicians as Frederick M. Bryan and Allie Ross.

The itinerary will include Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago and possibly St. Louis. From this big effort it is hoped that colored musicians from all over the United States will become actively associated with the movement to exploit Negro music, and later on we look forward to this co-operative spirit making itself sufficiently felt as to provide for the establishment of a national school of Negro music, one where the colored child may secure instruction regardless of financial condition.

The Negro music of America gained a foothold in this country between 1619 and 1850, when members of the race were heard in songs of sorrow, of joy, of humor and sentiment, which were the natural growth of a people musically inclined in Africa and whose melodious outpourings were intensified by conditions of slavery.

Then from 1850 to 1865 came the minstrel songs full of character, but less lofty of sentiment and less true of real Negro aspiration and inspiration.

Next was the advent of the jubilee singers in 1870, generally conceded as an artistic triumph.

From 1875 to 1888/1898 there was no further development in Negro music. This temporary stagnation was due to the fact that the American Negro had been so thoroughly taught by the American white man that his color, condition and accomplishment were inferior, that the younger generation at once threw aside all tradition. Any reference to the past became a disgrace.

Except in a few schools in the South, to sing jubilee melodies to a Negro audience was an insult and often led to the dismissal of the teacher urging them. The Moody and Sankey hymns were used exclusively in our churches and schools---the glorious old slave hymns and spirituals frowned upon as "reminding us of a past full of shame and misery."

Talented Negroes sought in their musical study to eradicate all traces of that individual character which has attracted the attention of the world. Result: Milk and water imitations of inferior white musicians.

About 1898 marked the starting and quick growth of the so-called "ragtime." As far back as 1875 Negroes in questionable resorts along the Mississippi had commenced to evolve this musical figure, but at the World's Fair in Chicago "ragtime" got a running start and swept the Americas, next Europe, and today the craze has not diminished.

There was a good reason for the instantaneous hit made by "ragtime." The public was tired of sing-song, samey, monotonous, mother, sister, father sentimental songs. "Ragtime" offered unique rhythms, curious groupings of words and melodies which gave the zest of unexpectedness. Many Negroes---Irving Jones, Will Accooe, Bob Cole, the Johnson brothers, Gussie L. Davis, Sid Perin, Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker and others wrote some of the most celebrated songs of the day. In other instances white actors and some writers would hear in St. Louis such melodies as "New Bully," "Hot Time," etc. and change the words (often unprintable) and publish them as their own creations.

### **Renaissance [sic] of Negro Music**

At this time came Dvorak. He saw that from this people, even though their material had been debased, must come a great school of music, not necessarily national, but rather new and characteristic.

A few earnest Negro music students felt as did Dvorak. They studied the man, so broad, genial; and human, carefully and thoroughly.

Some Negroes of real musical accomplishment---Harry T. Burleigh, a pupil of Dvorak, is baritone soloist at St. George's Church, New York City, and sings in the choir of the Temple Emanuel, 44th street and Fifth avenue. He is

musical editor at Ricordi's, the leading operatic publishing house of the world.

Nathaniel Dett, a young man who was graduated from the Oberlin School of Music, is now director of music at Hampton Institute. He has developed "Listen to the Lambs" and other compositions and has proven his right to be taken seriously by the musical public.

J. Rosamond Johnson has shown marked versatility as a composer, having attracted attention both as a writer of Negro music and popular numbers. He is now giving much of his time to the development of the Music School Settlement in Harlem, of which he is head.

Carl Diton, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, is a thorough master of the science of music. For two years he was a student in Germany. At present he is teaching music at Talladega College. His admirers feel that this young musician has a bright future as a composer.

It is quite often the case that the composer of music is inspired by the lyrics. The wonderful poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar have more than once moved me to write Negro melodies, as have lyrics by Alex Rogers, James W. Johnson, and Lester A. Walton.

Last, but greater than all of these, I must name a comedian, not a musician or a lyricist, George W. Walker, the late lamented partner of Bert A. Williams. His has been the greatest influence in the development of modern Negro music. At twenty-eight he could not read a note and could hardly read his name, yet day and night he talked Negro music to his people, urged and compelled his writers to give something characteristic. Each year he wanted bigger and better things. He engaged the best Negro voices in the United States and their success in ensemble singing was as great in London, Paris and Berlin as in New York, Boston and Chicago. Dvorak would have been proud to know such a man. In all reverence---Dvorak--George Walker. They had high ideals and they showed the way.

Developed Negro music has just begun in America. The colored American is finding himself. He has thrown aside puerile imitations of the white man. He has learned that a thorough knowledge of the masters gives knowledge of what is good and how to create. From the Russian he has learned to get his inspiration from within; that his inexhaustible wealth of folklore legends and songs furnish him with material for compositions that will establish a great school of music and enrich musical literature.

## Cook on Dance

1926, in December: Cook wrote a letter to the NY Times dated December 19, 1926 that was published December 26, 1926, p. X8, arguing at length against giving credit to George White and his revue for inventing the Charleston and Black Bottom dances. This important and indicative letter is reprinted in full in Maud Cuney-Hare, Negro Musicians and their Music (1936), pp. 135-36.

In the letter, Cook takes on the role of historian of African American modern dance. He had been overtly involved with modern dance at least since *Darkydom* (I), and apparently led dance bands in the later 1910s. And, of course, dance is important in his family: daughter Marion and son-in-law Louis Douglass, nephew Hartwell and niece Louise are all dancers.

The Charleston was first featured on stage as a dance in How Come (spring 1923). Early that year Thomas Morris published his song "Original Charleston Strut" (1923). Later that year, Cook had a hand in getting Runnin' Wild (1923) up and running---a show featuring not just the dance but now also a song, Johnson's song "The Charleston" (1923). The Black Bottom is new on stage in Irvin C. Miller's Dinah (1923-1924), music & lyrics by Brymn and Bechet; the show runs at the Gibson in Philadelphia in the weeks of November 19 and 26, 1923, then at Lafayette in the weeks of Monday, December 3&10&17, 1923. The Black Bottom is viewed as the dance-craze successor to the Charleston in references that explode in the mainstream press only in 1926 and 1927. Cook's Hotsy Totsy (1925) originally featured the Charleston and perhaps also the Black Bottom; both dances are in the Paris version of that show (La revue nègre), a point Cook mentions in the Times letter.

Cook writes:

Spirituals and Jazz

*To the Editor of the New York Times:*

I wish to take exception to one or two statements in the article in Sunday *Times* lauding George White and his scandals. Among other accomplishments Mr. White is credited with the creation of the "Charleston" and "Black Bottom" dances.

I have the greatest respect for Mr. White, his genius as an organizer and producer of reviews; but why do an injustice to the black folk of America by taking from them the credit of creating new and characteristic dances?

From "Old Jim Crow" to "Black Bottom," the negro dances came from the Cotton Belt, the levee, the Mississippi River, and are African in inspiration. The American negro, in search of outlet for emotional expression, recreates and broadens these dances. Either in their crude state, or revised form, in St. Louis, Chicago or New York the dance is discovered (?) by white theatrical producers and sold to the public as an original creation.

The "Charleston" has been done in the South, especially in the little island lying off Charleston, S. C., for more than forty years to my knowledge. The dance reached New York five years ago. In Harlem any evening a group of negro children could be seen "Doin' the Charleston" and collecting pennies. This dance was first staged in a real production by Frank Montgomery in "How Come." Leonard Harper, a colored man, used a few steps of the dance.

The first music with this fascinating rhythm was the "Charleston Strut," written by Tommy Morris and published by Jack Mills, Inc., about four years ago.

Jimmy Johnson, a negro song writer, first conceived the idea of a Charleston songs [sic], and in his score of "Runnin' Wild," for Miller and Lyles, wrote the famous "Charleston," which was staged by Elida Webb, and the craze was on.

It is doubtful if Mr. White even saw a "Charleston" until he attended the final rehearsals of "Runnin' Wild."

Similarly, for many years, the "Black Bottom" has been evolving in the South. Irvin Miller first produced the dance about three years ago in New York at Lafayette Theatre. Two years ago Louis Douglass, famous in Europe, thrilled all Paris as he and Josephine Baker "Black Bottomed" at the Champs-Elysée Theatre.

Messrs. White et al. are great men and great producers. Why, with their immense flocks of dramatic and musical sheep, should they wish to reach out and grab out little ewe lamb of originality?

WILL MARION COOK.

New York, Dec. 19, 1926

### 3. Cook and Didactic Programming

#### Introduction

Throughout his career, Will Marion Cook took direct action to illustrate his historical outline of African-American music and musicians in the theater and on the concert stage by means of explicitly didactic programming. He was not the only one to design musical programs around the move from Africa to slave days to the present, by any means---it is a familiar trope---but he was one of the originators of this narrative, one of its big promoters, and was involved with others in its promulgation, beginning with the program for the 1893 Carnegie Hall benefit and the program for the Chicago Fair later that same year, and continuing for over forty years, as late into his career as the August Pageant at the 1934 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.

This is a topic that cries out for major expansion and contextualization. Recent scholarship (pulled from the internet) that touches on it briefly, without particularly noting Cook's place in the phenomenon, includes David Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 132-35; Stephen Blum, "Samuel Araujo with Grupo Musicultura: Musical enactment of attitudes toward conflict in the United States," in Music and Conflict, ed. John Morgan O'Connell and Salwa E-Shawan Castelo-Branco (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), pp. 232-242 at p. 236; and David F. Garcia, Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

-----

#### Didactic Programming

1893, in February: The February 1893 Carnegie Hall benefit concert in support of a production of Cook's Uncle Tom's Cabin opera was intended to show the progress of the colored race in music, a characteristic Cook theme of which this may be the first instance. It was to begin with "wild plantation melodies" and end with Gounod's "Ave Maria" (New York Times, February 10, 1893, p. 9). In 1893, he had as yet developed no vision of a future for African Americans as modern composers, aside from himself in his opera; rather, he stressed that

blacks were capable of singing Western classical music. They were civilized/advanced/Europeanized as performers.

The program:

Anon., "The Lord's Prayer," Fisk Jubilee Singers, choir  
 Giuseppe Concone, Aria, Lulu Hamer, contralto  
 Paderewski, "Polonaise," Paul Bolen piano  
 Pietro Centemeri, Grand Aria, Sissieretta Jones, soprano  
 James S. Smith, Arion Waltz [for piano; arr. from the celebrated vocal waltz of F. A. Vogel; possibly Smith's arr. for piano four hands?]  
 Dudley Buck, "The shadows deepen on the castle walls" [tenor aria from Buck's 1874 dramatic cantata, The Legend of Don Munio, Op. 62]  
 Anon., "Hand down that robe," Fisk Jubilee Singers  
 Giacomo Meyerbeer, "L'Africaine: Aria," Sissieretta Jones  
 Selections, Jeff Caldwell, baritone  
 Selections, C. W. Payne, tenor  
 Anon., "Ave Maria," Sissieretta Jones, Will Marion Cook, Fisk Jubilee Singers [other sources name it as Gounod's work]  
 Spiritual, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," Fisk Jubilee Singers

NB: Jennie Jackson Dehart is named in newspaper accounts anticipating this concert; Charles Wesley Payne and Jefferson N. Caldwell were longtime members of various Fisk Jubilee Singers troupes, often with Dehart in a quartet or double quartet, and managed by Mumford (e.g., Washington Post, October 7, 1890, p. 5; Washington Post, November 21, 1892, p. 6); Charles Mumford was the manager of a Fisk Jubilee Singers troupe for twenty years from the 1880s into the 1900s (Abbott and Seroff, Out of Sight, p. 42); the expression "Mumford's Fisk Jubilee Singers" itself is not common, but his name frequently comes up in conjunction with the ensemble.

1893, in August: The concert on Colored People's Day at the Chicago Fair on Friday, August 25, 1893:

In the end, no opera by Cook was performed in August 1893 at the Fair. Instead, several speakers spoke and a concert was performed; the musical numbers paralleled those of the February benefit concert in

Carnegie Hall. The Dudley Buck aria is repeated. Plato stands in for Sissieretta Jones, singing Meyerbeer. Woodward, Freeman, and Burleigh stand in for the Fisk Jubilee Singers men Caldwell and Payne. Douglass stands in for Cook as violin soloist. And a duet from Cook's opera is the big number that stands in for the "Ave Maria." A white student pianist from the National Conservatory, Maurice Arnold Strathotte, replaces a black student pianist from that institution, Paul Bolen. Without the Fisk Jubilee Singers, there is no "before" in a picture of historical development, though. Rather, as in February, the accomplishments of African-American performers in European-American classical repertoire are highlighted.

There were seven musical numbers "and as many and more encores as there were original appearances":

Mme Deseria Plato sang Meyerbeer's "Lieti Signor" [from the Huguenots] and was unanimously recalled for an encore, which was "Nearer My God to Thee".

J. Arthur Freeman, tenor, Dudley Buck's recitative and aria, "The Shadow Deepens"

Harry Thacker Burleigh, Bizet, Carmen, Toreador's Song

Sidney Woodward, tenor, [aria from] Verdi's I Due Foscari

Joseph Douglass, Violin Fantasie from Trovatore

Paul Dunbar read an original ode on "The Colored American"

Burleigh and Woodward, a duet from Cook's planned Uncle Tom's Cabin opera

1898, in April: Cook's article in The Prospect (presented above in full) is the first published articulation of his history of African American music. In outline, he deals with:

Africa

Slave songs

New Negro songs with rag accompaniment;

Gussie Davis, Bert Williams, Bob Cole

Dvorak

Coleridge Taylor

Harry T. Burleigh



1901, in March: From NYC on March 29, Cook wrote to Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee to propose that Cook organize a choral touring company of eight singers and an accompanist, called "Tuskegee's Real Negro Singers," to do a mixed program of twelve numbers consisting of "uncultivated slave song," "slightly developed melodies," and "four numbers of a rather ambitious character." Nothing came of this, but it is clearly a vision of the kind of progressive program that Cook would promote for the rest of his career (Booker T. Washington Papers, p. 67).

1903: Not involving Cook, but relevant here, and by artists who were in his circle:

The Evolution of Ragtime, a big six-song theatrical ensemble number (Bob Cole & J. Rosamond and J. W. Johnson variously contributing; all songs published separately with NY: Stern, 1903), including:

"Voice of the Savage"  
 "Echoes of the Day"  
 "Essence of the Jug"  
 "Darkies Delight"  
 "The Spirit of the Banjo!"  
 "Lindy: Sounds of the Times"

"Voice of the Savage. (Zulu dance)," lyrics Cole, music J. Rosamond Johnson (NY: Stern, 1903)

"Echoes of the Day: Daylight is Fading," lyrics J. W. Johnson, music by J. R. Johnson (NY: Stern, 1903); LoC copyright December 3, 1903;

"Essence of the Jug," lyrics, J. W. Johnson, music Bob Cole (NY: Stern, 1903); LoC copyright December 3, 1903

"Darkies' delight: introducing 'Carve dat 'possum'," lyrics J. W. Johnson, music Cole (NY: Stern, 1903); LoC copyright December 3, 1903; later published in the Ten Choice Negro Folk Songs (NY: Glove, 1909) of Stern catalogue songs mostly by Cole and J. R. Johnson; WorldCat cites from the 1905 Ladies Home Journal issue that had a set of Cole and Johnson songs, of which this was the second: "[this song] illustrates the earliest style of negro popular music. Songs of that period were almost always about good things to eat, or good times. The most famous one . . . was 'Carve dat 'possum,' written by Sam Lucas"; the Lucas number was a song published in

1875; see also "Spirit of the Banjo"

"The Spirit of the Banjo," lyrics Bob Cole and J. W. Johnson, music J. Rosamond Johnson (NY: Stern, 1903; repr. Riis 2015); the third of four songs that are supposed to represent the growth of the forms of negro music from the days of old minstrelsy to the present; this third song represents the old-time banjo song of the cotton-fields; the sheet music cover says it is one of "Peter F. Dailey's Famous Song successes," and it was "Sung at Klaw and Erlanger's Aerial Theatre, New York City"; in Ladies Home Journal, July 1905

"Sounds of the times: Lindy" (or just "Lindy"), words J. W. Johnson, music Cole and J. R. Johnson (NY: Stern, 1903); obviously the most "modern day" of the songs in the series;

also "Sung at Klaw & Erlanger's Aerial Theatre, New York"

1903, in October: "Will Marion Cook, the noted musician and composer, has been spending some time at Tuskegee, observing the workings of the Institute and making a special study of plantation melodies" (Indianapolis Freeman, October 3, 1903, p. 1); this would have been during Elbert Williams's first term as bandmaster there, 1903-1904. Recall the 1901 proposal that Cook made to Booker T. Washington (see above).

1911, in January: Not an event in which Cook had a hand, but pertinent here is a Washington, DC benefit concert, "The Evolution of the Negro in Story and Song," mounted at the Howard Theatre on January 27, 1911, during the Howard's first season of operation.

1911: In the first playlet of Cook's 1911 Darkeydom, "Songs of Sunny Lands," the action moves only from Africa to the plantation, but the final number features "a red hot couple" doing the latest dances and then being joined by "all hands." The significance here is double: Cook is not only an observer and contributor to the vocal music scene, but is also an entirely up-to-date observer of developments in African-American social dance.

The song "Eagle Rock" names some dances that are popular or just about to break out. NB: Dabney and Cook wrote "Pensacola Mooch" for Ziegfeld in 1910. Fanny Brice danced the "Grizzly Bear" in the Ziegfeld

Follies in 1910. Burriss and Smith's 1913 song "Ballin' the Jack" mentions doing "the Eagle Rock" in its chorus.

"Eagle Rock"

Talk about yo' "Mississippi Dips"  
 Yo' "Dixie Drags" and "Florida Flips"  
 "Pensacola Mootch" and "Grizzly Bear"  
 Ever one of them is a tame affair;  
 Dat "Turkey Trot" and "To-dle-o"  
 Nor "Gobble Glide" don't go no mo'  
 'Cause here's de sweetes' dance dat's happened yet  
 De AB-SO-LUTE-LY one bes' bet:

Chorus:

It's de Eagle Rock, I got a weakness fuh de Eagle Rock  
 When de fiddles tune you starts to fret,  
 Jes wind an' wind an' den you set  
 Like a eight day clock – you git to movin' an you reel an' rock  
 When de ban' is heard, like a Eagle bird, you stretch yo' wings  
     den you sway an' swing  
 Den you stan' right still – an' you slowly rock until –  
 You rock so low, you nea'ly touch de flo'  
 Den you slowly rise, look in Baby's eyes, git yo' second win'  
     den start again'  
 An' Eagle --- Eagle --- Eagle, Eagle Rock.

(II)

Once upon a time – birds of de air,  
 All met up in de sky somewhere  
 An' de bird what done de greates' thing  
 Wus the one to be elected "King":  
 De birds all sung den sung some mo'  
 Mistere Eagle den he tuk de flo'  
 An' danced, an' when he finished with dat soulful swing  
 Dem birds all screamed out "Welcome King"

Chorus:

It's de Eagle Rock, da fust edition of da Eagle Rock, etc.

(This number will introduce all of the popular Darky dances of the day and finish with a terrific, whirlwind, all-hands DANCE)"

1912, in October: after a significant gap of time where his attention was elsewhere, Cook published in the newspapers a proposal of plans for a giant production called Negro Life, to be mounted at Madison Square Garden.

The October 1912 plan called for an eight-day festival in six parts, in which "the gradual development of Negro music will be shown up to the present," a scheme that had been part of his personal thinking for two decades. The program mostly was devoted to vocal music, but there is one segment devoted to "The Essence" dance. Cook's scheme:

1. Old African songs, the plantation melodies, to whose weird, crooning music many of us were rocked to sleep in the days of our insufficiency
  - = Slave songs, hymns, and early minstrel songs, for a chorus of 300, an orchestra of 150, and fifty old men and fifty old women for character work
2. The "Essence" song and dance, produced by 100 people (Minstrelsy's most famous dance, going back to Dan Bryant, "The Essence of Old Virginia" a.k.a. The Arkansas Traveler dance [lots of on-line references, and see also Stearns and Stearns, Jazz Dance], gives rise to buck and wing or soft shoe; a Billy Kersands specialty)
3. Lighter minstrel songs and airs of the past fifty years
  - = lighter and popular songs of the last fifty years
4. Clorindy (35 minutes)

5. Popular songs by modern negro composers, among them Cole and Johnson

= lighter songs of J. Rosamond Johnson, Burleigh, Cook and others

6. Brief musical sketches, and more ambitious music by Burleigh, Coleridge-Taylor, and Cook

= heavier compositions of Negro composers including Coleridge-Taylor

1913, in the fall: Cook became associated with the Washington Conservatory of Music and a new vocal ensemble, the Afro-American Folk Song Singers, that it was to sponsor. He helped to get the group off the ground in 1913-1914 and much later returned to work with it in 1919 in a Philadelphia concert.

Their first concert program in Washington "will show the progress of the Afro-American singer from the old spirituals of the slave, to the more highly developed works of such colored composers as Coleridge-Taylor, Burleigh, Johnson, White and others, and finally his study and grasp upon the masterpieces of musical literature" (Washington (DC) Bee, November 8, 1913, p. 1).

The Washington Herald, Sunday, November 16, 1913, p. 10, says the concert will take place next Friday (November 21) at the Metropolitan M. E. church on M street between 16th and 17th N.W.

A full program was printed in McGinty (1979); also, Tucker, Ellington: The Early Years (1991), p. 11 and fn. 30, cites a concert program archived in the Moorland-Spingarn Collection, "Washington, D.C. Programs," Box 4. Featured, but not in any particularly historical order, are choral arrangements of Negro folk songs; Abbie Mitchell in Negro folk songs, folk-inspired pieces by Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and Godard, and classical songs; Harry Nugent and Lottie Wallace singing classical songs; Henry Grant playing Rondo capriccioso by Mendelssohn; and four "Characteristic Afro-American Compositions" by Cook: Swing Along, Lovers Lane, Rain Song, and Exhortation.

The program included:

"Oh, Yes," called a choral transcription (i.e., an arrangement) of a Negro Folk Song composed for this program by Cook in Sept. 1913; presumably arranged by Cook from Thomas P. Fenner, Religious folk songs of the Negro as sung on the plantations (Hampton Institute, 1909)

"My Lady Chlo" by Henry Clough-Leiter and Myron Freese (1901); popular modern song; for voice and piano, and also arr. as part song for male or female quartet; done here by male chorus  
also called Negro love song, Pickaninny's Lullaby, African Love Song;  
recorded on Victor in 1916

"De Coppah Moon" by Harry Rowe Shelley and William Fraser (1908); popular modern song; published as solo song with piano and as four-part chorus for male or female voices; done here by male chorus

The original folk songs "Steal Away" and "Nobody Knows" sung by Abbie Mitchell, presumably in versions for voice and piano

Three Songs with folk origins by Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and Godard, sung by Abbie Mitchell

"Troubled in Mind" by Coleridge Taylor (1905), in a "Choral transcription arranged for this program," presumably drawn from his setting for piano that was published in his Twenty-Four Negro Melodies (1905)

NB: the Washington Bee, November 1, review of the prior Baltimore and Washington concerts, says "Oh, Yes" and "I'm Troubled in Mind" are "the first choruses ever developed upon Negro melodies" and in context seems to ascribe both to Cook. Important words here are chorus and develop, suggesting that there have been "developments" of Negro

melodies for other performance forces (e.g., Coleridge-Taylor's piano variations), and suggesting that developments are not the same as transcription/arrangements, of which there were certainly many by this time.

"Classics," i.e., classical songs, sung by Harry Nugent, Lottie Wallace, and Abbie Mitchell, and pianist Henry Lee Grant playing Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccio

Four "Characteristic Afro-American Compositions" by Cook:

Swing Along

Lover's Lane

Rain Song

Exhortation (presumably not the solo voice version but rather the version for tenor and male chorus)

1913, in the fall: another event without Cook's hand in it, but relevant here: a W.E.B. DuBois pageant, called originally either merely "the pageant" or "The People of Peoples and Their Gifts to Men," but two years later acquiring the name "The Star of Ethiopia." It was conceived of for the New York City Emancipation Celebration of October 1913, and it had music ranging from African drums to Coleridge Taylor (Wiki entry; and see Lucien White NY Age column with musical items specified for 1913); its text is published in The Crisis for November 1913; there are many Googlebook hits to modern secondary literature mentioning this pageant.

1915, in May, in Cook's Chicago Defender interview presents the second big iteration of Cook's historical essay (printed in full above):

1619-1859 The Beginning

Africa

Slave songs

1850-1865 Minstrel songs;

James Bland

1870 Jubilee singers

1875-1880 reaction against slave hymns and spirituals

1888 Beginning of Ragtime;

Irving Jones, Will Accooe, Bob Cole, Johnson brothers, Gussie L. Davis, Sid Perrin, Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker

Dvorak

Harry Burleigh, Nathaniel Dett, Carl Diton, Melville Charlton

George Walker

Establishing a school in DC

1915, in the fall: Not a Cook event, but relevant here.

The next version of the DuBois 1913 Pageant, mounted two years later and now known as Star of Ethiopia, adds Cook's "Swing Along" to the "history of the development of the negro music . . . [in] some forty selections"; J. Rosamond Johnson was music director when it was given again in Washington DC in 1915 at the American League Base Ball grounds on October 11, 13, 15 (Washington Bee, September 18, 1915, p. 1; Washington Bee, October 9, 1915, p. 1; Washington Bee, October 16, 1915, p. 1)

1916, in the spring: Not a Cook event, but relevant here.

Mrs. Azalia Hackley's first-of-its-kind Folk Song Festival at Washington's Metropolitan AME Church, with a giant 150 voiced amateur choir singing works including those by Burleigh, Cook, Dett, Diton, J. R. Johnson, Sam Lucas, etc. (Washington Bee, February 26, 1916, p. 5; the affair will be "next Tuesday").

1918, in September: in the New York Age, Cook's essay again (as printed above); it is very much the 1915 text, advocating at the end for a bricks-and-mortar national school:

1619-1850 Beginnings

Africa

Slave songs

1850-1865 Minstrel songs

1870 Jubilee singers

1875-1888/1898 throwing aside tradition



Ragtime (from 1875, with push at World's Fair):

Irving Jones, Will Accooe, Bob Cole, the Johnson brothers,  
Gussie Davis, Sid Perin, Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker

Dvorak

Harry T. Burleigh, Nathaniel Dett, J. Rosamond Johnson, Carl Diton

George Walker

The colored American is finding himself

1918, in the fall: There is a proposed Clef Club tour, which does not take place; instead, it morphs into Cook's New York Syncopated Orchestra and its offshoots, i.e., Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra (and its successors in Europe, whether or not under Cook) and Cook's American Syncopated Orchestra. The tour program was anticipated to range from the old spirituals to the standard works of modern Negro composers. From the proceeds of the tour, it was hoped to provide for the establishment of a school.

Note: the NYSO, SSO and ASO programs are virtually identical in approach; by design, they actually do not advance chronologically, but rather, diversely mix the old and the modern.

1921, in the spring: Not a Cook event, but relevant.

Mrs. Harriet Gibbs Marshall's concert in support of a National Negro Conservatory in 1921, surveying "Three Periods of Negro Music and Drama," was held in New York at Town Hall on April 24, 1921, as a fundraiser for the National Negro Conservatory, or National Negro School of Music. The three-part program included native African performers doing African music, the Hampton Quartet doing spirituals ("songs of the antebellum period"), and noted soloists and the Folk Song Singers of the Washington Conservatory (or a group from the Singers or a quartet from this ensemble) with Dett, doing modern works ("a sort of recital of violin, piano and vocal music by the younger colored generation"). This program was "virtually repeated" a year later in Washington, DC on May 6, 1922 at the Lincoln Theater.

1924, in January: Cook's Negro Nuances was a one-off Benefit Concert in January for the "Negro Folk Theatre Association" or "Negro Folk Music and Drama Society (an organization for the purpose of developing and

exploiting Negro talent)"; also called a Negro Musical Night for the "Negro Folk Theatre Association."

It was to have spawned a subsequent (planned) Broadway book show that was to have opened later the same spring; see Cook's letter to Tony Langston at the Chicago Defender, where the show is said to be about "the soul of a Race, told in song and dance" (Chicago Defender, March 22, 1934, p. 7). This big show did not, in the end, get off the ground.

See John Howland, ""The Blues Get Glorified": Harlem Entertainment, Negro Nuances, and Black Symphonic Jazz," Musical Quarterly 90/3-4 (Fall/Winter 2007): 319-370, at Figures 1 & 2 (pp. 13, 14) for reproductions of two ads for the January event and for a scenario for the later big show of Negro Nuances; see also his book, "Ellington Uptown": Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, and the Birth of Concert Jazz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Pres, 2009), chapter 5, figures 3.1 and 3.2 at pp. 114, 116.

What follows here is a summary of the already abridged and edited version offered by John Howland of Cook's elaborately detailed working outline, which is archived in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. Total running time on stage was to be about 90 minutes. For the later book show as below, Cook's title is Negro Nuances: Episodes in the Musical Life of the Negro (The Soul of a Race Told in Music, Drama, and Dance).

#### FIRST NUANCE

Scene 1, 10-12.5 minutes: Africa

Interlude

Scene 2, 3 minutes: Ghost Ship (Cook's 1907 number for the Pekin)

#### SECOND NUANCE

Scene 3, five minutes: Cotton fields of Georgia

Interlude

Scene 4, 10 minutes: ca. 1860 and Emancipation

#### THIRD NUANCE

Scene 5, 30 minutes: Clorindy (Cook's 1898 tab show)

Interlude

Scene 6, 22 minutes: Garden of Flowers. very tropical.

#### FOURTH NUANCE

Scene 7: New Orleans or the Land of Jazz; incl. the Charleston;  
 one song here is "Darkey Love," which might be the song from  
 1911's Black Bohemia, but most material is from Runnin' Wild.  
 Both the working outline and a Cook letter to the Chicago  
Defender says that he calls the last nuance "The Land of Jazz";  
 most of the music here is by Sidney Bechet and Jimmie Johnson

1926, in January: a benefit, "An Evening of Negro Music," a benefit concert,  
 originally to be a series of concerts of the "better" race music. Cook was  
 trying to raise money for the **Negro Art School** or **Negro School of  
 Music**. In the end, participants in the single concert included Abbie  
 Mitchell, Tom Fletcher, Hann's Cotton Club Quartet (the 4 Emperors of  
 Song), the Dixie Jubilee Singers, and Duke Ellington's Washingtonians (a  
 jazz band of eight pieces).

Reviewed in NY Age, January 16, 1926, p. 3.

Ellington's band played a jazz number after each vocal selection in the  
 first half, including opening with "Swanee Butterfly" and closing the first  
 half with Ellington's own "The Jig Walker."

Abbie Mitchell sang a group of songs in Part I including Lawrence  
 Brown's "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" and Harry Burleigh's  
 arrangement of "Little David, play on your harp," plus an encore of  
 Cook's "Mammy"; in Part II she sang Cook's "Exhortation" and J.  
 Rosamond Johnson's setting of Dunbar's "Li'l Gal", with Cook as  
 accompanist.

Hahn's quartet sang "All God's chilluns got shoes," "Ev'rybody talkin'  
 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there," and other jubilee songs and spirituals.

The Dixie Jubilee Singers sang on both halves of the program, doing "So I

can change my name," "Swing low, sweet chariot," and other numbers.

Joe Jordan came up to the stage from the audience and accompanied Tom Fletcher in two numbers; Fletcher and Jordan performed "Oh, wouldn't that be a dream" [a 1905 song by Joe Jordan and Earl C. Jones, sung by Ernest Hogan in Rufus Rastus], and encored it with "I'm goin' to exit" [a song by Jordan and Gillespie made popular by Harrison Smith, from the first Pekin show, The Man from 'Bam (1906)].

1926, in June: in theatrical column from New York by Billy E. Jones, Cook is said to be writing the lyrics for a new show for next season, RUGGED ROAD (Chicago Defender, June 19, 1926, p. 7). Three weeks later, "Cook is laying low these days. He has something up his sleeve" (Chicago Defender, July 10, 1926, p. 8, quoting Billy Jones's "Theatrical News" column from NYC). Just possibly, "Rugged Road" is an attempted theatricalization---even, a Cook opera, in his own terms---of the road from Africa to Harlem, and thus another in a long line of such efforts and proposals.

1926, in December: on December 5, Cook mounts a benefit, Virginia Nights, with 8 soloists and an ensemble of 16, in "Negro spirituals, part songs and folk songs." Frustratingly, a full program has not yet turned up.

1929, in May: an article says Cook "is now interested in an opera that will unify all that is negroid in music" (Washington Post, May 5, 1929, p. SM 5)

1930, in January: traces of a show, Dust and Dawn, never staged, reappearing in fall 1934 with didactic programming (see below).

1934, in August: a gigantic Pageant for Chicago's Century of Progress exposition, on Friday, August 25 at Soldiers' Field. This was "O, Sing A New Song": A Negro Pageant, a three-act, three-hour spectacle with a cast of 5,000, in musical numbers with song and dance and immense costumed pantomime scenes, narrated by Richard B. Harrison. Cook is credited with the underlying scheme, and was an active participant in the preparations in New York and Chicago, as well as performing on stage. The show depicts "the progress of the Negro people from

savagery, through bondage to their place today in civilization," that is, "from the jungle to Harlem."

**Part I was in the jungles of Africa** (the Negro in his native Africa).

"The first scene in the three hour drama pictured the Negro in his native Africa. A jungle village lay quiet in the early dawn . . . From a tower Richard B. Harrison . . . narrated the action" (Chicago Tribune, August 26, 1934, p. 7)

"Ode to the Sun" (a.k.a. "An Ode to the Rising Sun"),  
by Harry Lawrence Freeman, who conducted the orchestra ("hundreds of young girls performed the dance in authentic fashion"; photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 5)

"Muttering Thunder" [a storm scene]; likely that N C. Smith's "The Muttering thunder" is sung here

A gleeful Fire Dance [after the storm passes]

A pantomime scene when warriors defend the village women and children from the demon lion that threatens them (photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 5)

"The Witch Song" (probably the same as The Voodoo Dance with photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 5)

A scene of the rout of native tribes by the white man (Portugese traders); their king is captured and they are bound into slavery

NB: On the (ghost?) performance of Will Marion Cook's "Ghost Ship" at the Pageant, see Time 24/1 (1934), p. 39.

NB: N. Clark Smith's "Prelude and Prayer" was to open the prologue to the pageant (Chicago Defender, August 11, 1934, p. 20), and here the reference is probably to the first movement, "Prelude," of his Negro choral symphony, which draws upon Steal Away, Swing Low, Know Like Jesus, Nobody Pray, and Crucifixion; an early version of this material was for tenor, piano, and orchestra; and his music was part of Part I, depicting Africa, using "Iron Workers," "Muttering Thunder," "Bamboula Fire Dance," and "Bangangi" (Ohman (2003), p. 71); of these four, only "Muttering Thunder" was a published work.

**Part II on the cotton plantation** (Plantation scene in pre-abolition days).

The Umbrian Glee Club did Cook's "Swing Along" somewhere in this Part

Three Spirituals conducted by J. Wesley Jones:

"Bye and Bye,"

"Go Down Moses" ("one of the most touching scenes," singled out with a photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 5), and "Steal Away to Jesus"

"Pickin' Cotton" (a huge scene, a mass formation of 1000 singers; photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 3)

"John Brown's Body"

"Dixie"

A figure of Lincoln speaks the Emancipation Proclamation

"Rise, Shine, Give God the Glory" ("Praise God a'Mighty, I'm Free At Last")

**Part III in the modern age.**

The figure of Booker T. Washington, and his words; marking the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute

"Carry Me Back to Old Virginny/Virginia"

Irene Castle introduced Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, "the Peer of All Tap Dancers," who demonstrated some of the taps which made him famous, assisted by a bevy of cute dancers from Chicago's Grand Terrace café (photo in Chicago Defender, September 1, 1934, p. 5) and then Irene Castle McLaughlin directing a revue of dances she and her late husband had made famous (Cake Walk, Bunnie Hug, Texas Tommy, Castle Walk)

A comedy chorus of doughboys

Jungle rhythms in modern setting, i.e., modern tunes made popular by Negro musicians, incl.

for Part III, Noble Sissle and his orchestra played, Earl Hines played the piano (including Maple Leaf Rag)

Abbie Mitchell sang "Red, Red Rose" with Cook at the piano

and Abbie took a leading role in the version of St. Louis Blues  
conducted by W. C. Handy

A mechanistic ballet, depicting modern industrial life

Grand Finale: To close, Sissle and an ensemble sang

"O Sing a New Song," which he and Vodery wrote.

NB: for the pageant, Noble Sissle copyrighted two songs:

"O, come let us sing," words, Sissle, music J. R. Johnson

"O, let us sing a new song," words Sissle, music Vodery

NB: The Chicago Defender (September 1, 1934, p. 3) says that the  
final episode also spotlighted:

John Burdette and Lewis White, baritones

The famous Mundy choristers

J. Wesley Jones and his Metropolitan Church choir

the Umbrian Glee Club

The Fisk Jubilee Quartet

Earl Hines, pianist and orchestra leader

Noble Sissle and his orchestra

NB: Just a week earlier, on August 18, the Fifth Annual  
Chicagoland Music Festival took place at Soldiers' Field,  
sponsored by the Chicago Tribune. This event is not to be  
confused with the Pageant in the same venue just days later.  
A chorus of 1000 African Americans, trained by J. Wesley  
Jones and James A. Mundy, sang there (Chicago Defender,  
August 10, 1934, p. 5; Chicago Tribune, August 12, 1934, p.  
5; Chicago Tribune, August 18, 1934, p. 1). Their repertoire  
was to include:

"Old Southland" by J. Rosamond Johnson, based on "Go  
Down, Moses"

"Mighty Lak a Rose," with soloist Mrs. Clara Malone

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," with soloist Miss Willkie Jones

Then twenty minutes later the chorus and soloists will return to  
sing:

"De Ol' Ark's Movin'"  
 "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho"  
 "Ol' Man River," sung by baritone John Burdette  
 "Wagon Wheel," John Burdette and chorus

1934, in October: Cook announced in the last week in October that a production of Dusk and Dawn would open in December; surely this was to have been an expanded form of 1930's Dust (sic) and Dawn

It was to be a musical extravaganza for Broadway with a cast of 200; libretto by Sterling Brown, R. Butcher, and Mercer Cook; Mrs. Florence Price of Chicago is joining Cook in the musical tasks (she is a Wanamaker Prize winner for 1927).

Mentioned for the cast are Abbie Mitchell, Bessie Smith (1894-1937), Jasmine [Jasmino in Afro Am] Leroy, Jazzlips Richardson, Edward Boather, and Mantan Moreland [who was also mentioned for St. Louis Woman, as above]. This production does not take place---once more a big false alarm---a failure to thrive under Depression-era conditions. (big column in Philadelphia Tribune, November 1, 1934, p. 15; same text, not as accurate, in Baltimore Afro American, November 3, 1934, p. 6; Pittsburgh Courier, November 3, 1934, p. 8, with by-line as "CHICAGO, Nov. 1--(ANP)").

Brief outline description:

Africa  
 The slave ship  
 Slavery in America  
 The folk song period  
 Ragtime  
 The work song  
 A Forest Fantasie

-----

**A comment on musical idioms**



On account of his background and training, and articulated in the distinctions he draws (along with others) between various kinds of music, Will Marion Cook worked in and between various musical worlds: European-American classical concert music (which he basically walks away from, except for promoting the performance of numbers like Brahms's Hungarian Dance no. 5 and Dvorak's Humoresque), African American musical theatre, African music, ante-bellum spirituals and plantations songs, and "modern" part songs.

Concerning his own idiom, note the description of his music as Tchaikovskian by Florence Price (1934),

and a comment about doing something along a Dvorakian line for one of the Cannibal King projects (1901, with Harry Smith),

and William Grant Still's categorization of Cook as "borderline serious":

"American Negro pioneers in the serious field: like Harry T. Burleigh, J. Rosamond Johnson, John Work, Florence B. Price, Clarence Cameron White, Nathaniel Dett and the borderline composer, Will Marion Cook (all members of ASCAP)."

(Quoted in Jon Michael Spencer, ed. The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music [Duke University Press, 1992], a special edition of Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology 6/2 (Fall 1992), at p. 192.)

By comparison with many of his most important contemporaries, Cook did not devote any significant amount of his own compositional attention to transcription/arrangements of spirituals. In his writing and programming, he carefully delineates categories including quartet/choral arrangements of spirituals and folk songs (uncultivated slave-song; ante-bellum melodies or plantation airs and their harmonizations and arrangements), more extended and artistic developments of this folk material, modern quartet arrangements of current popular songs, and his own modern part-songs. These are distinctions important to him even in contexts where the programming is not explicitly chronological/ developmental. The very best example of the latter context is the programming for the NYSO, SSO, and ASO. He always has two quartets, one for the more roots-oriented (rural, Southern) material and one for the more modern quartet material.

A QUERY: Is there a Cook distinction between spirituals and jubilee songs? And does Cook recognize contemporary northern urban black gospel quartets? ASO quartette repertoire distinguishes spirituals from folk songs; some evidence (e.g., what the Excelsior Quartette records for OKEH Records) seems to point to spiritual as synonym for jubilee song. The best bet is that Cook distinguishes spiritual (folk songs) from (secular) folk songs.

Regarding Cook's choices of quartets:

1893: Mumford's Fisk Jubilee Singers (a quartet) in the NYC Carnegie Hall benefit in February 1893.

1893: Cook planned to include the Fisk Jubilee Singers (quartet) in his program for the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893.

1901, in March: From NYC on March 29, Cook writes Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee to propose that Cook organize a choral touring company of eight singers and an accompanist, called "Tuskegee's Real Negro Singers," to do a mixed program of twelve numbers consisting of "uncultivated slave song," "slightly developed melodies," and "four numbers of a rather ambitious character." Nothing came of this, but it is clearly a vision of the kind of progressive program that Cook would promote for the rest of his career. (Booker T. Washington Papers, p. 67)

1913-1919: Cook is involved with the Afro-American Folk Song Singers.

1914: Will Marion Cook and Burleigh are associated briefly with Negro Choral Society of Greater New York, and Burleigh with the chorus of the Music School Settlement

1919 New York Syncopated Orchestra (NYSO) quartets were:

Glenwood Quartet (spirituals); they are the "famous Glenwood Quartet" and share the stage with Jubilee Singers in 1914; they share the stage with the Exposition Jubilee Four in the NYSO; not many newspaper hits

Exposition Four a.k.a. Exposition Jubilee Four a.k.a. Exposition Jubilee Quartet (more modern material) of New York City; newspaper

hits back to 1913, 1914 and 1915; "vocal harmony and good comedy"; known for the latest song hits and also for southern melodies and direct from the cotton fields material; on national tours in vaudeville, e.g., Keith circuit, etc., and in touring lists of NY Age, for example: "A Southern Breeze of Harmony and Comedy" or "A Southern Breeze of Mirth and Melody" or "Emperors of Mirth and Melody"; they "sing modern melodies and the old songs of the cotton belt"; "colored vocalists whose repertoire is largely composed of southern melodies"; they have a presentation of a crap game played to songs, and they also have several Southern melodies in their repertoire; the act is smart and well dressed, and they do "well selected popular numbers"; a famous act; lots of newspaper hits over many years

1919 Southern Syncopated Orchestra (SSO) quartets were:

the Exposition Jubilee Quartet (mostly same personnel as in NYSO) and another quartet; together they could form a double quartet

1919 American Syncopated Orchestra (ASO) quartets were:

the Folk-Lore Quartet (in its eighteenth year) and the Excelsior Quartet (in its sixth year); newspaper accounts and programs distinguish folk songs from spirituals:

Folk-Lore Quartette, jubilee singers, doing folk songs; newspaper hit says it numbers only college graduates: Charles Alexander, Charles Williams, T. P. Bryant, H. T. Jackson

Excelsior Quartette a.k.a. the American Quartette, doing spirituals on ASO programs; newspaper hit says they are "old time Jubilee singers": James A. Lillard, William Coleman, William Dixon, William Crawford

NB: Quartets in Cook's 1920s year-end holiday-time benefit performances, incl. Eva Jessye's Dixie Jubilee Singers.

COOK'S EPERTORIAL DISTINCTIONS.  
FOR EXAMPLE:

**Spirituals and folk songs:**

Deep River  
 Go Down Moses  
 Swing Low, Sweet Chariot  
 Roll, Jordan Roll  
 It's Me, Oh Lord  
 I Got a Robe

Noah Built the Ark (trad. folk song)

**Modern quartet or soloist & quartet arrangements of current popular songs:**

Rose of No Man's Land (1918)  
 Ja Da (1918)  
 Tishomongo Blues (1917)  
 Everything is Peaches Down in Georgia (1918)  
 Mother of Mine (Mammy O' Mine, Mother O' Mine), solo and chorus, music,  
 Maceo Pinkard (1919)

And the Afro-American Folk Song Singers do "My Lady Chlo" and  
 "De Coppah Moon" in quartet arrangements.

**Cook's modern works for quartet or quartet and soloist, or larger SATB forces plus soloist, include:**

Swing Along  
 Lover's Lane  
 Rain Song  
 Exhortation (tenor and quartet)

Ghost Ship  
 Conjure Man

#### 4. Cook and the Promotion of Schools for the Training of African American Students in Theater and Music

1892: If Cook's initial 1892 plans for music at the fair in 1893 were to come to fruition, "the money realized therefrom will be used for establishing a conservatory in connection with Howard University for the musical education of colored men and women" (Chicago Daily Inter Ocean, October 30, 1892, p. 20).

Note, though, that the February 10, 1893 NY Times preview of the Carnegie Hall benefit says the money will go to help defray costs of the opera production---costumes and chorus---at the Chicago Fair.

1897, in March/April: Cook is involved in some sort of plans for a National Conservatory in the District of Columbia. [NB: Mrs. Thurber's institution in NYC is often called the "National Conservatory of America" but also called "National Conservatory of Music of America" in newspapers.] The proposal for Washington is for a new, different but related "National Conservatory of Music of America," with Thurber behind it. Fleetwood is secretary and Will Marion Cook is associate secretary of an organization set up to keep an eye on this. Put another way, Thurber goes to Congress for some money (\$25,000) and the language is such that it is possible to read the situation as requiring that the money be spent in DC, hence the interest of Cook and others. (Note that in one form or another, Thurber had been looking for a while for extending the scope of her National Conservatory and possibly establishing it permanently at the Capital [e.g., New York Times, January 17, 1890, p. 7]).

1898: Cook's important article "Music of the Negro: Past, Present, and Future"; see also 1915 and 1918 versions. He concluded the later two versions with a pitch for a school.

1901 Will Marion Cook wrote Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee in 1901 about setting up a group---a chorus of eight---for the school and touring with it.

1903 Will Marion Cook was at Tuskegee for a visit in fall 1903 to study plantation melodies. Elbert Williams was in his first fall as bandmaster there.

[Brooks, "The Tuskegee Institute Singers," Lost Sounds, pp. 320-327.

Tuskegee had a touring quartet from 1884 and a school choir from 1886. Abbott and Seroff, Out of Sight, pp. 43, 87 offer two references to a troupe of Tuskegee jubilee singers in 1889 and 1890. Hits on the quartet turn up from 1892 to 1896 in genealogybank.com but no "Tuskegee Institute Quartet" hits in LoC at as such. Tuskegee quartet hits in LoC also very rare, with a couple for "Tuskegee jubilee quartet" in 1903 for the same event in Minneapolis. Refs. in New York State papers also rare before 1914-1916, with two hits in 1897 for the same event. So, when Will Marion Cook was writing Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee may have been out of commission--off the map musically in vocal music---though Brooks does not remark on this. Brooks says the Tuskegee touring quartet was reorganized in 1909, but I do not find hits on it. Only in 1914-1916 have I found genealogybank.com hits on "Tuskegee Institute Singers," when the double quartet goes out on travelling Chautauqua circuits. The octet (double quartet) recorded for Victor in 1914, 1915, 1916 as the Tuskegee Institute Singers. (Victor website says it is mostly the double quartet but sometimes just a quintet.) LoC Chronicling American has hits in 1918, 1919. In 1926, 1927 they recorded again for Victor as the Tuskegee Institute Quartet.]

1905 sidebar:

"It is much to be hoped that the idea of a national negro conservatory and college of music, now broached, should be carried to fulfilment. Every such step taken lifts the race prospects, and all such enterprises will eventually compel equal opportunity and conquer the evil prejudices which now hamper them at every turn." (Springfield (Mass.) Republican, December 30, 1905, p. 13). Who broached this idea?

1908 sidebar:

A big Lester Walton column in NY Age, November 19, 1908, p. 6 prints and discusses at length a letter from Mme. E. [Emma] Azalia Hackley (1867-1922), who proposes that Fisk Conservatory be expanded into a National Music School for Negroes. Hackley is a musician and activist with a strong interest in musical education for soloists and choirs, and she is a big promoter of folksong festivals. Walton sees ample opportunity for blacks in (white) northern music schools, but thinks a southern school for blacks would be welcome.

1912: Cook is involved with benefit events for the NYC Music School Settlement for Colored People in May 1912, 1914, 1918, and son Mercer is a participant in the school's activities until he goes off to high school

in DC.

In fact, in 1924, Deacon Johnson counts Will Marion Cook first on the list of those who worked to benefit the school:

"TO GROW AS WE SERVE/Singers and Players/Everywhere./ And to Help Those Who Help Themselves/  
Will Marion Cook, the late David I. Martin, Attorney Eldridge Adams, Prof. Mannes and the late King of Syncopation, James Reese Europe, collaborators in concert for the benefit of the late colored Music School Settlement, lifted the singers and players of Greater New York from a position hardly enviable to one of international esteem and confidence" (NY Age, May 31, 1924, p. 6).

1912: The May 1912 Music School Settlement for Colored People benefit concert at Carnegie Hall, the first of its kind, featured James Reese Europe and the Clef club, with Cook preparing and leading a chorus of 150; it spurs an article later that year by Natalie Curtis that hits the theme that most colored musicians are "ashamed of their best heritage--the folk music of the old plantation" [NB: Fisk students were initially reluctant for that reason to sing spirituals; NB: this is one element in Cook's narrative, too]

1912, in October: Cook planned a huge musical festival, "Negro Life" in six parts for NYC as another Music School Settlement for Colored People benefit; it falls through.

1913, in February: A year after the first, James Reese Europe and the Clef Club lead the second big Carnegie Hall benefit concert for the Music School Settlement, but this time without Cook's involvement.

1913 Cook is associated with Washington Conservatory of Music and the Afro-American Folk Song Singers that it sponsors. He helped to get the group off the ground in 1913-1914 and later returned to work with it in 1919 in a Philadelphia concert.

Their first concert program, explicitly didactic, "will show the progress of the Afro-American singer from the old spirituals of the slave, to the more highly developed works of such colored composers as Coleridge-

Taylor, Burleigh, Johnson, White and others, and finally his study and grasp upon the masterpieces of musical literature" (Washington (DC) Bee, November 8, 1913, p. 1).

1914: Cook is involved at beginning of year with the Greater NY Choral Society, and then with the Music School Settlement chorus; Cook is quoted in 1914 by Lester Walton to say "It is discouraging to note what little value colored Americans place on Negro music, and [Cook] expresses fear that members of the race will not wake up to the great possibilities our music and legends offer for development until white Americans publicly and unreservedly voice their appreciation. . . . When the Negro population shall have awakened to the great beauty of its own legends, stories and melodies, then it shall consider these a proud heritage to be cherished and developed" and the need for the establishment of choral unions for the study of the works of the masters. ("Negro Music," NY Age, January 1, 1914, p. [6])

In a more developed form these themes turn up in Cook's 1915 statement, as below.

1914, in March: Cook is involved again with the annual benefit for the Music School Settlement; it is the third in the series of these yearly events at Carnegie Hall; James Reese Europe now leads the "National Negro Symphonic Orchestra"

1914: The subsequent Outlook review of the 1914 Music School Settlement benefit (Outlook, v. 106 (1914) p. 611) hits a Cook theme, saying "there has been a tendency on the part of the Negroes and some of their educators, both white and colored---to regard the Negro plantation songs and "spirituals," and more especially the rhythms and other distinctive elements in negro music, as relics of degradation. There has been some real ground for fear that with education the Negro musician would abandon the musical riches . . ." [NB: the early sentiment at Fisk to abandon spirituals].

1915: Cook writes a big historical statement in 1915 (originating in his 1898 article and reiterated in a 1918 essay) about Negro composers and the need to found a school for musical training, and says "Negroes . . . are laying aside their shame of the past and are beginning to glory in their



unmatched heritage of folk lore and folk songs"; he here amends some 1898 positions; plus, a school must be established, etc.

Chicago Defender, May 1, 1915, p. 6; NY Evening Post, May 20, 1915, p. 6 (as a letter from Will Marion Cook to the editor, dated May 17, 1915); Kansas City Sun, July 3, 1915, p. 2 and Cleveland Gazette, July 3, 1915, p. 4, in a syndicated column called "Afro-American Cullings"

1915, in July: A letter of Cook to the Cleveland Gazette calls for a national school for Negro musicians, possibly in Washington, DC, and says "New York and other large cities of the North are neither seeking nor finding the right way" (Cleveland Gazette, July 3, 1915, p. 4); see also May 1915 statement in the Chicago Defender

1916 Sidebar:

Wellington Alexander Adams (born Pennsylvania 12/22/1879 - [???6/1974?]); marries Nanni/Naomi in 1908), poet, pianist, violinist, composer, educator; he is at Columbia Conservatory until at least October 1928 and he wins first and fourth prizes = Wanamaker prizes in St. Louis in August 1927; he writes a music column in the Bee] Wellington Adams founds his Columbia Academy of Music at 704 T Street in spring 1916; this address is at the corner of T and 7th St. NW, just south of the Howard campus, a block east of the Howard Theater, and about two blocks from the Cook house; in 1916-1917 it is renamed the Columbia Academy and Conservatory, with both academic and music classes; Adams is president and founder of the whole affair, and teaches at the Conservatory, but he appoints William G. Braxton (organist) as director of the Conservatory per se.

1918, in May: MUSIC SETTLEMENT BENEFIT

Monday, May 27 at Aeolian Hall, a major concert arr. by J. Rosamond Johnson as a benefit for the Music Settlement School, including the Clef Club Singers and Players under Cook's baton ("a dynamic force with the baton"), etc.

(NY Age, May 25, 1918, p. 6; rev. Lester A. Walton in NY Age, June 1, 1918, p. 6)

Johnson's main purpose here, as elsewhere after he took over in 1914, was to showcase talent among school students and faculty, and the Clef Club group was the big outside element in the program.

1918, in September: Cook in 1918, in "On Negro Music," plugs the anticipated fall 1918 Clef Club tour and reiterates his 1915 statement NY Age, September 21, 1918, p. 6; on the tour, see also, e.g., the Washington Bee, September 21, 1918, p. 8 and the Richmond Planet, October 5, 1918, p. 10;

NB: Clarence Cameron White in 1924 article "The Musical Genius of the American Negro," Etude 42 (May 1924), pp. 305-6) sounds like he models closely on Cook's historical outline statement, with much expansion;

Cook hopes that one outcome will be "the establishment of a national school of Negro music"; he is concerned because "the younger generation at once threw aside all tradition. Any reference to the past became a disgrace . . . . the glorious old slave hymns and spirituals [were] frowned upon as "reminding us of a past full of shame and misery"

NB: THIS IS A BRICKS AND MORTAR SCHOOL: a summary version of the news release is printed in Washington Bee, September 21, 1918, p. 8: "We are endeavoring to strengthen and uplift the Clef Club that all the Afro-American musicians of the United States will become actively associated with its growth, and through this association a national school of Afro-American music will be established. A school that will teach the child of great talent, regardless of his financial condition. Our first effort in this direction will be a tour . . . . "

NB: just a year later, in 1919, the founding of the National Association of Negro Musicians [NANM, which still exists and thrives] with Henry Lee Grant as first president; there is in its vision statement a call for a Negro school of music (in the sense of a group, not of a bricks-and-mortar institution); Wellington A. Adams is involved and would be editor of a proposed journal]

Washington Conservatory late 1920 and early 1921 initial drive for a National Conservatory, supported by programs featuring African, ante-bellum and modern music:

In late 1920 Oberlin graduate and educator Harriet Gibbs Marshall (1868/69-1941) started a drive to raise \$100,000 to endow a National

Negro Conservatory. Her stated aim was "to establish a national conservatory for the purpose of preserving negro music as expressed in the folksongs," or in another version, "for the study and development of Negro music." The campaign for \$100,000 was launched with a concert in Washington, DC featuring several soloists at the Howard Theater on March 6, 1921. The beneficiary was to be what the Bee (March 5, 1921, p. 1) called "a National School of Music, a department of which will be devoted to the development and preservation of colored-American folk songs and plantation melodies---that music which the colored American claims as his own." In The Etude (May, 1921, "World of Music," p. 000), it says similarly that "A Colored National Conservatory of Music is planned, and a movement has been inaugurated to raise funds for the support of the institution. It will include a department for the preservation of the negro folksongs and plantation melodies."

Shortly thereafter, a different concert, "Three Periods of Negro Music and Drama," was held in New York at Town Hall on April 24, 1921 as a fund-raiser for the National Negro Conservatory, or National Negro School of Music. (Lucien H. White puts it that it was a benefit for the Washington conservatory with the purpose of raising an endowment for the establishment of a national school of music.) The three-part program included native African performers doing African music, the Hampton Quartet doing spirituals ("songs of the antebellum period"), and noted soloists and the Folk Song Singers of the Washington conservatory (or a group from the Singers or a quartet from this ensemble) with Dett, doing modern works ("a sort of recital of violin, piano and vocal music by the younger colored generation"). This program was "virtually repeated" a year later in Washington, DC on May 6, 1922 at the Lincoln Theater. In references to the 1922 concert in DC, the conservatory was already being referred to as a the "national negro music center" and Marshall is "chairman of the board of directors of the National Negro Music Center."

Clarence Cameron White, in "The Musical Genius of the American Negro, The Etude (May 1924), pp. 305-6 at p. 306, mentions that Gibbs-Marshall has launched a Negro National Conservatory.

After Marshall went with her husband, Napoleon B. Marshall, to Haiti (1922-1928), where he was military attaché to the American Legation, the project seems to have gone nowhere, but back in the US, and following the death of her husband in 1933, when she took over the Washington Conservatory again, she re-started up the drive, with a

more limited goal---the establishment merely of what had been the Department for Preservation in the initial prospectus. This became the National Negro Music Center, based at the Washington Conservatory, which opened in 1936. One of the last projects she undertook before her death in February 1941 was to conduct a fund-raiser for the National Negro Music Center in October 1940.

**National Negro Conservatory:** Chicago Broad Ax, September 4, 1920, p. 2; Duluth News-Tribune, December 5, 1920, p. 12 ("Drive for National Negro Conservatory"); Wichita Negro Star, December 24, 1920, p. 1 ("Must Save Negro Music"); Adrian (Mich.) Daily Telegram, December 10, 1920, p. 4; Dallas Express, January 1, 1921, p. 1 ("Would Establish Conservatory of Negro Music"); Washington Bee, March 5, 1921, p. 1 ("Campaign Launched"); "A drive for the purpose of raising \$100,000 has been started to endow a National Negro Conservatory of Music" (The American Musician and Sportsman Magazine, 2/000 (1921), p. 9); Washington Bee, March 12, 1921, p. 2 (about a recital in the endowment campaign for "a national school of music for colored Americans at the Washington Conservatory of Music"); advertisement in NY Age, April 16, 1921, p. 6; Lucien H. White, "'Three Periods of Negro Music and Drama' at Town Hall Sunday" (NY Age, April 30, 1921, p. 5); Musical America, April 30, 1921 (quoted in McGinty art.; refers to both the "National Negro School of Music" and to the "National Conservatory"); NY Sun, April 25, 1921, p. 14 ("Native Africans at Town Hall"); Washington Bee, May 14, 1921, p. 6 ("Concert to Aid Colored American Conservatory/ Native Artists in Interest of National School Give Exposition of Own Music" and mention of "the colored American Music Center endowment"); an item in the page of brief entries called "The World of Music," as above, in The Etude 39/5 (May, 1921), p. 289; Billboard, May 14, 1921, p. 45; Clarence Cameron White, "The Musical Genius of the American Negro," The Etude 42/5 (May, 1924), pp. 305-306; The Southern Workman 62/000 (1933), p. 114; Maude Cuney-Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music (1936), p. 255.

**National Negro Music Center:** Washington Evening Star, April 30, 1922, p. 71 (Part 3, page 1); Washington Herald, May 6, 1922, p. 3; Washington Evening Star, May 6, 1922, p. 28; Dallas (TX) Express, May 6, 1922, p. 4; Washington Post, September 1, 1940, p. A7 ("Negro Music Center to Open Fund Campaign"); Washington Post, September 29,

1940, p. A6 ("Negro Music Center Plans Drive for \$5000/ Campaign to be Conducted in October: Group is Accumulating Library and Conducting Bibliographical Research")

And also

McGinty, Doris Evans, ed. A Documentary History of the National Association of Negro Musicians. Chicago: Columbia College Center for Black Music Research, 2004.

1926, in January: With a benefit concert in the 1925-26 season, Cook is trying to raise money for a **Negro Art School** or **Negro School of Music**

1926, in December: "Fourth season" of theatre and music school benefit concerts, in the 1926-27 season. Cook, identified as "director" or "head" of **The Negro School of Dramatic and Musical Art**, presents Virginia Nights on December 5.

1934: The proceeds from the August pageant in Chicago at the Century of Progress Exposition were to go toward establishing musical scholarships for Negroes (Chicago Defender, August 16, 1934, p. 7)

1936, 1938: while in retirement in Asheville, Will Marion Cook goes to help out at the Brainerd Institute in Chester, S.C., about 116 miles SE of Asheville. The Brainerd Institute, a boarding school founded by the Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen at Chester, South Carolina in 1868, was a four-year high school by the 1920s. Facing declining enrollments, in the mid 1930s it had become a junior college specializing in teacher training, and it closed in 1939.

## 5. Cook and the Institutional Promotion of African American Theater

At Pekin in 1900s and at Lafayette in 1910s Will Marion Cook participates actively in support of viable black theater troupes and repertoire. He sees their main vehicle, of course, as the musical. At both theaters, this was not merely a matter of individual shows or projects, but rather, of repertory and training---institutionalization via repertory companies tied to theatres.

By the decade of the 1910s Cook was just as interested in supporting drama as music through some kind of school. His calls for schools and training companies, e.g. in 1919, mid 1920s, mid 1930s, parallel those of others. Drama and music intertwine in these school proposals.

Sidebar: in the fall of 1919, a Negro School of Dramatic Art is part of the aspirations of Lester Walton, along with a proposed negro theater syndicate involving talent from the Lafayette Players. One wonders whether Will Marion Cook and the Clef Club/NYSO project were related in any way.

Cook was a major figure in the birth of the Lafayette Players in the 1910s. **The Lafayette Players** were active from 1916 to ca. 1923 in NYC, and later, especially in Chicago and on tour and on the West Coast. This troupe focused its efforts on mainstream drama, not, for example, plays written by black playwrights or plays concerned with the black tradition. When Cook returned for good from Europe in 1923, he found the Lafayette Players dissolving. From 1921 forward, the Lafayette Players are not often working in the Lafayette theatre itself, which is mainly showing movies and vaudeville. New York City appears to lack an active African American theatrical stock company.

For at least four years across the mid 1920s, Cook made efforts to get a national school of dramatic and musical arts for African American students up and running in New York City. (For a brief sketch of this scene, see also Hill and Hatch, p. 216-18, 222-23.)

Sidebar: 1922-23 was the first season of Chicago's **Negro Folk Theatre**, a.k.a. Colored Folk Theater, under white producer/director Raymond O'Neil.

NAMES: Negro Folk Theater-Chicago 1922-1923 with first production(s) in 1923 (Raymond O'Neil)  
 Colored Folk Theater (the same as above---Raymond O'Neil, a name used in the Defender, but rare = twice only)  
 Ethiopian Art Theater (the same Chicago company led by Raymond O'Neil, under yet another name, relatively common, in late Spring 1923)

Its first production was Oscar Wilde's "Salome" from January 29, 1923; done with a playlet, "The Chip Woman's Fortune," as a curtain-raiser; its productions were taken to DC and NYC at Lafayette in week of April 23 and on Broadway in early May; the company included Sidney Kirkpatrick and Laura Bowman, who came out to Chicago after their long stint with the Lafayette Players from c. 1916-1922; the troupe also does "A Comedy of Errors," poorly received; it announced a repertory including "A Comedy of Errors" (played in a circus tent with a jazz band, thus played "a la Jazz"), "Every Man" (played in a "black and tan" cabaret), Moliere's "The Follies of Scapin," "George," an expressionist play from the German in 4 [or 22] scenes, "The Taming of the Shrew" and others to be announced, including a series of colored folk plays, tragic and comic (NY Age, The Call). NB: Willis Richardson's "The Chip Woman's Fortune" is published in Black Drama in America, ed. Turner.

This group packs it up and Bowman and Kirkpatrick rejoin the Lafayette Players for 1923-1924; they are with Ida Anderson and her famous players in 1924-1925.

(Chicago Tribune, January 25, 1923, p. 21; NY Clipper, February 14, 1923, p. 25; Chicago Broad Ax, February 3, 1923, p. 1, 2; Chicago Tribune, March 4, 1923, p. D16; Chicago Tribune, March 6, 1923, p. 23; Chicago Defender, April 28, 1923, p. 7; St. Paul Appeal, April 28, 1923, p. 1; NY Call, April 29, 1923, p. 6; NY Age, May 6, 1923, p. 6; Chicago Defender, May 12, 1923, p. 7; Christian Science Monitor, May 14, 1923, p. 7; Yonkers Statesman and News, May 17, 1923, p. 12; Chicago Defender, May 19, 1923, p. 6; NY Call, May 20, 1923, pp. 5-6, in "Plays and Players" column signed by Blanche Watson; NY Times, May 20, 1923, Section 7, p. 1; Chicago Tribune, May 27, 1923, p. D1; Chicago Defender, June 16, 1923, p. 6)

1924, in the spring: the first season of NYC's **National Ethiopian Art Theatre** (and its school, the **National Negro Ethiopian Art Theatre School, Inc.**) fostered by the Harlem Community Theatre Organization. The name was taken over from that of the Chicago troupe. The organization was incorporated by Ann Wolter (of Carnegie Hall), Ernestine Rose (New York Public Library, Harlem branch), and John S. Brown, with a New York State Charter, on February 23 (NY Times, February 24, 1924, p. S6). Preliminary arrangements were completed for it in April, 1924. See also Chicago Defender, February 2, 1924, p. 8.

Individuals involved include Ann Wolter of Carnegie Hall as director, Henry Creamer as director of dancing (chorus dancing and jazz numbers) and Albert W. Noll as director of music (he headed the Choral Society). Charles Gilpin, Richard B. Harrison, and Jessie A. Shipp are among the Associate Directors. Raymond O'Neil is also involved, when his Chicago-based Ethiopian Art Theatre dissolved.

Abbie Mitchell stars in a production by the National Negro Ethiopian Art Theatre Co. of The Gold Front Stores at the Lafayette for the week of March 3-9, 1924, directed by Raymond O'Neil, and then she stars in a drama written by Miller & Lyles, Going White, at the Lafayette for the week of March 10 (NY Age, March 8, 1924, p. 6; Chicago Defender, March 8, 1924, p. 12; Chicago Defender, March 15, 1924, p. 9; Pittsburgh Courier, April 26, 1924, p. 16). At the end of the first (spring) season the school gave its first student recital on June 19, 1924 at the New Star Casino, for which Jessie Shipp was stage director (NY Age, June 23, 1924, p. 6).

The 1924-1925 season was its second season, and its first full year. Students put on three one-act plays at the Lafayette on October 15, 1924. The company holds a benefit on December 7, 1924; no trace of Will Marion Cook or Abbie or Creamer, but Florence Mills and Richard B. Harrison do one number, with readings and lots of music, including vocal solos and choral works. Students did more dramas on May 26, 1925. The company was very active and covered extensively in the black press for two seasons.

(Chicago Defender, February 2, 1924, p. 8; Pittsburgh Courier, April 26, 1924, p. 16; NY Age, June 28, 1924; NY Age, September 6, 1924, p. 2;



Baltimore Afro American, Friday, October 17, 1924, p. 14; Chicago Defender, October 27, 1924, p. A10; NY Age, December 13, 1924, p. 7; Chicago Defender, December 13, 1924, p. 18; Chicago Defender, January 17, 1925, p. A11; Chicago Defender, May 23, 1925, p. A2; etc., etc.; heavy coverage in the Pittsburgh Courier; NY Times, April 19, 1925, p. X13).

1924, in January: with Will Marion Cook back from Europe for just under a year, "Negro Nuances" is staged as a benefit for the **Negro Folk Music and Drama Society** (NY Age) or **Association** (NY Evening Post), or the **Negro Folk Theatre Association** (NY Evening Telegram); the group already exists and is sponsoring the event, and its purpose is to develop negro talent. NB: Chicago's Ethiopian Art Theatre explicitly called itself a "folk theatre", opened a repertory season in NYC on May 7, 1923, and was copied in NYC in 1924, so in fact Cook may be associated with the NYC group, as above, and working to support it.

Sidebar: "Folk theatre" here is a code word for a larger movement:

Hatch and Shine, eds., Black Theatre USA (rev. ed., 1996) has a section on Folk Plays of the 1920s and a "lower-case" Negro folk theater movement, with a useful three-page introduction, on pp. 213-215: Du Bois, Locke, and J.W. Johnson were involved; Alain Locke is one who theorized in favor of the "folk play", and Du Bois called for a "Negro Folk theatre"; NB: the "Little Theatre" movement, and Du Bois and the Krigwa Players and the Krigwa Little Negro Theatre (1925-1927), a.k.a. the Krigwa Players of the Little Negro Theatre of Harlem. (See also Hill and Hatch, p. 216-18, 222-23).

Hatch and Hamalian, Lost Plays of the Harlem Renaissance 1920-1940 have an appendix, "Documents Relevant to the Lost Plays of the Harlem Renaissance" that includes:

Willis Richardson, "The Hope of a Negro Drama" (1919)  
 Alain Locke, "Steps toward the Negro Theatre" (1922)  
 Raymond O'Neil, "The Negro in Dramatic Art" (1924)  
 Du Bois (1926), etc.

all of this is clearly relevant to the environment of Cook's benefit.

NB: Hemsley Winfield started the "New Negro Art Theatre," a dance company, in 1925.

1924, in December: Benefits held for the school with no Cook involvement; students perform.

1926, in January: "An Evening of Negro Music"; a benefit concert; Will Marion Cook is trying to raise money for the **Negro Art School** or **Negro School of Music** in with a concert or concerts; the Chicago Defender announces "Will Marion Cook Opens Art School" (Chicago Defender, January 9, 1926, p. 6); concerts originally to begin December 27, 1925, then delayed to January 10 and 17, 1926, and then just January 10; school to be founded by Abbie Mitchell, Henry Sterling Creamer, and Will Marion Cook. Will Marion Cook and Creamer (1879-1930; partner with Turner Layton, etc.) had worked together often over the last 20 years, including at the Lafayette in the 1910s, and Creamer had been a part of the National Negro Ethiopian Art Theatre School of 1923-24 and 1924-25. In the concert, Abbie Mitchell was supported by Tom Fletcher, Hann's Cotton Club Quartet, the Dixie Jubilee singers, and Duke Ellington's Washingtonians.

1926 sidebar: apparently at some point this year, Mrs. Isabelle [or Isabelle] Taliaferro Spiller (1888-1974) founded the Spiller School of Music [less often, Spiller Music School] at her home at 232 West 138th St. (in addition to working at a Brooklyn High School); hits in NY Age from 1927-1928 season. (NB: Cook often stayed at the Spiller house; he rehearsed Hotsy-Totsy there in the basement in August, 1925).

1926: NB November Savoy Ballroom Benefit for a fund for disabled and sick actors, with Cook's participation

1926, in December: A "Fourth season" of theatre school benefits. Cook, identified as "director" or "head" of **The Negro School of Dramatic and Musical Art**, is going to run a series of Virginia Nights beginning December 5 at the Greenwich Village Theatre. Artists to be featured were Abbie Mitchell, Revella Hughes, Zaidee Jackson, Madam DeKnight, Tom Fletcher, Henry Saparo, Hinton Jones, and a chorus. This is a benefit that will help aid [or whose proceeds are devoted to

establishing] the Negro School of Dramatic and Musical Art; this is the third such benefit of its kind for some such sort of school, the others being in 23/24 (Negro Nuances) and 25/26 (no special name). Only one concert was held.

## 5. Cook and the Institutional Promotion of African American Theater

Will Marion Cook was one of the most important figures in Black musical theatre from the 1890s to the 1930s, not just as a creative figure, but also as a supporter and promoter of institutions benefitting African American actors and theater troupes, especially repertory companies. The following chronology sets him in this context, beginning with the Pekin Theater and the Lafayette Players.

### The Pekin and the Lafayette

Abbie Mitchell remembers: "The Pekin theatre stock company of Chicago turned the tide for Negroes in the drama. Before the advent of this group of players, white actors made up dark for Negro parts in dramatic plays. The tide was turned by the Pekin stock company, but it was not fully so until about four years after when the Lafayette players were formed. Both of these organizations were responsible for the place that the Negro holds in the field of the drama today" (Detroit Tribune, June 8, 1940, p. 11, with the byline "CHICAGO--(By Etta Moten for ANP)").

-----

### The Pekin Theatre in 1906-1908

Chicago's Pekin Theatre was the first black-owned and operated house with a resident black stock company; its first two years of operation as such were 1906-07 and 1907-08. Joe Jordan was the founding composer of this enterprise, and was joined first by Will Marion Cook, then also by composers James Tim Brymn, and Lawrence Freeman. Brymn may have been sought to work alongside Cook, or to replace him, and Freeman certainly was the third in a trio of Jordan, Brymn, and Freeman after Cook's departure from the scene at the end of the 1906-1907 season. Cook's participation in this novel enterprise can be read as not merely a creative and business decision, but as a mark of his support more generally for institutions nourishing blacks in the arts and on stage, especially in light of the perspective of his career-wide activities along the same lines.

For the entire history of the Pekin, see the thorough book-length treatment by Thomas Bauman, [The Pekin: The Rise and Fall of Chicago's First Black-Owned Theater](#) (2014); see also Hill and Hatch, pp. 191-198.

For 1906-1908, see also Lefferts, "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of J. Tim Brymn: Materials for a Biography," at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/64/>

The next truly major initiative of this kind was undertaken at the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC in the fall of 1910, with a creative team of Leubrie Hill and Will Vodery (a Cook protégé who also had been in Chicago for the first year of the Pekin venture) as musical director. The theater opened on August 22, 1910. Its first manager was W. H. Smith, the former manager of the Pekin in Chicago, and one early plan was to present all the comedies that had been done at the Pekin (Washington [Bee](#), September 17, 1910, p. 5). The Howard experiment did not last a full season. For more on the Howard experiment, see "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Vodery: Materials for a Biography," at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/62/>

Later in the fall of 1910, a third major initiative of this kind was undertaken at the Pekin in Chicago, re-instating a resident company there with Jesse Shipp as the major creative figure. This venture lasted just one full season, but Shipp was involved in the Lafayette stock company a few years later and revived most of his Pekin shows there.

Given the Pekin's central role in the experience of running a black theatrical stock company, a chronology of the Pekin from 1908 through 1911 is provided below.

## **The Pekin, 1908-1912**

### **a. The Pekin, 1908-1909**

1908, late spring: Brymn has bailed out; Harrison Stewart and other major talent have left; the Pekin Stock. Co. has been disbanded.

1908, summer: mostly months of pure white vaudeville showing through the summer

1908, fall: the Fall Season begins Sunday, September 6, 1908; Motts provides another good stock company, which made its initial bow on Labor Day, and by popular demand there will continue to be a movie to open and close each performance (NY Age, September 10, 1908, p. 6); what this means is that the company produces one-act mini-musical comedies or skits as part of larger vaudeville bill; the Pekin can be followed in the Julie [Juli, July] Jones, Jr. column, "Chicago Show Shop," in the Indianapolis Freeman this fall

1908, September: Simple Mollie from Monday, September 7 (acc. Bauman) and September 13, 1908, the mini-musical is Simple Mollie, music by Hen Wise (NY Age, September 17, 1908, p. 6); apparently, there is also a musical skit featuring Williams and Stevens called Dr. Doo-Doo (Indianapolis Freeman, September 19, 1908, p. 5); Bauman book says Dr. Dodo is the curtain raiser, book and music by Hen Wise, and it runs only for a week, and Simple Molly O is the afterpiece, music by Hen Wise

1908, in September: Bauman book reports the curtain-raiser now is My Friend, running only one week from September 28

1908, October: in October 1908, the mini-musical is Reception Day in Africa, music by Hen Wise (Indianapolis Freeman, October 10, 1908, p. 5), Bauman calling this a curtain-raiser, and Ten Dark Knights is the finale (Bauman: afterpiece); Bauman puts the start for these shows on October 7, and says they ran for four weeks (thus to November 3/4)

GAP OF AMOST TWO MONTHS

1908, in December: Bauman book reports A Congo King beginning December 28, perhaps as the afterpiece, and it runs just one week.

MUSICAL COMEDIES ON HIATUS

1909, January: Then the fall 1908 stock company is reconstituted or recharged in January 1909, with many of the same performers as before, to do spoken stage plays in spring 1909 that aren't musical comedies, but then they will close the season with two musical comedies. Company was to open earlier, but then their opening is deferred to February 22 (Indianapolis Freeman, February 13,

1909, p. 5); an item in Broad Axe, February 27, 1909, p. 2 says it will open March 1; NY Age, Thursday, February 25, 1909, p. 6 reports that it opened earlier this week and drew well to its initial performance (I'm not sure this is to be believed, in fact);

1909, in March: Variety mentions the Pekin Stock Co. and says "The Pekin Theatre, running with vaudeville all season, is again occupied by a colored stock company, which made the little South Side playhouse popular. Manager Robert T. Motts has re-engaged Harrison Stewart and most of the former members of the company" (Variety, March 6, 1909)

1909, in March: the company ends up opening on Monday, March 1 with The Pet Dog, an adaptation by Marion A. Brooks of the English farce Confusion; it is the first of four farces in four weeks. Originally the four farces were to be followed by a musical comedy (Indianapolis Freeman, March 6, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, March 13, 1909, p. 5) at the end of March, but that changes (see below); the Pekin will "present real Colored comedy, by the old original Pekin Stock Company, J. Ed. Green, Jerry Mills, Charles Gilpin, Lawrence Chenault, J. F. Mores, Harrison Stewart, [etc.]" (Chicago Broad Axe, February 27, 1909, p. 2)

1909, in March: next, The Man Upstairs, opening the week of March 7, 1909, probably on Monday, March 8, in an adaptation by Marion Brooks of the English farce Facing the Music (Indianapolis Freeman, March 20, 1909, p. 5)

1909, in March: Who is Thompson, from March 15, 1909, an adaptation of the Three Hats

1909, in March: The Chambermaid, from March 22, 1909, adapted by Marion Brooks from Jane, a 3 act French farce

1909, in March: The Idlers, from March 29, 1909, in the company's first dramatic (non-farce comedy) effort, a four-act play by Haddon [Charles Haddon/Hayden/Hadden] Chambers, Americanized by Marion Brooks (Indianapolis Freeman, April 3, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, April 10, 1909, p. 5); this is apparently in place of the original intention, a musical comedy

1909, in April: as a benefit for an African American boy, Captain Swift is presented on a matinee, Thursday, April 15 (Chicago Broad Axe, April 10, p. 1)

1909, in May: finally the turn to musicals, with Sambo, from May 10, 1909, for three weeks, to May 30, 1909 (Bauman says for two weeks, thus to only ca. May 24, but Sunday Tribune of May 23 and "Chicago Theatre News" in NY Dramatic Mirror (column dated May 24) have it running this week and it is in its third week)

Sambo, a three-act musical play, music by Jordan (and text by Flourney Miller, acc. Bauman); features the three house comedians, Harrison Stewart, Charles Gilpin, and Jerry Mills; this is a return to the theater by the company after a short absence of about one month, and they are doing the musical comedy, as earlier had been promised for later March or early April; "a musical stock company is again occupying the Pekin Theatre under the management of Robert Motts" and Sambo is its initial offering; a score or more of musical numbers, including:

"Dinah Dear"

"My Southern Lou"

"Pleading Eyes"

"Sambo"

"I Want Nobody but You"

(Chicago Broad Ax, May 15, 1909, p. 2; Chicago Tribune, May 16, 1909, p. B2; Chicago Broad Ax, May 22, 1909, p. 2; Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1909, p. B2, B3; NY Dramatic Mirror, May 29, 1909, p. 7; Chicago Tribune, May 30, 1909, p. B2)

1909, in May: The Husband

from May 31, 1909, a second musical, a revival of The Husband, in three acts; with Green's staging, Jordan and Brymn music, and the Miller & Lyles text; Harrison Stewart returning in the lead, etc.



(Indianapolis Freeman, July 10, 1909, p. 6; Sampson, Ghost Walks, p. 468); Bauman says this runs three weeks, so thus to ca. June 20 NY Age, May 13, 1909, p. 6 says they have closed up for the summer, but this is before they mount the musicals, and NY Age, July 15, 1909, p. 6 says that the Pekin Stock company is now a thing of the past, but . . . .

1909, July: Joe Jordan has given notice at the Pekin and is going to NYC to take charge of the orchestra department in one of the big publishing houses (Indianapolis Freeman, July 10, 1909, p. 5)

### **b. The Pekin, 1909-1910**

1909, in August: J. Ed. Green and Marion A. Brooks form the Chester Amusement Company in Chicago to manage vaudeville acts and to manage and book theaters, and its home is the little Chester Theater, a moving picture house on State and 32nd (NY Age, August 12, 1909, p. 6; NY Age, September 16, 1909, p. 6; NY Age, October 7, 1909, p. 6, etc.);

Brooks had tried to start a company in Montgomery, Alabama at the end of the 1908 Pekin season with Flournoy Miller, and after this short 1909 venture in Chicago, he tries again a third time in New Orleans at the Temple Theater, once more as a combination house playing both vaudeville and musical comedies (NY Age, October 16, 1910, p. [6])

1909, in August: The Colored Aristocrats on Thursday, August 26, Miller and Lyles made their first appearance before the public not as dramatic authors but as comedy stars in their own right on stage, in a big show planned for the road, a musical extravaganza, The Colored Aristocrats; it is their own play, i.e., book by Miller and Lyles, ensemble music composed by Sidney L. Perrin; they advertise for musicians in June, rehearse from mid August at the Pekin; as a tryout, they do at the Pekin the "washerwomen's trust" scene (Indianapolis Freeman, May 29, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, June 5, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, August 28, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, September 4, 1909, p. 5)

1909-1910 season: The Pekin is mainly a high-class vaudeville house all season; Indianapolis Freeman, September 25, 1909, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, October 9, October 16, October 23, December 25, 1909, May 7, 1910; Chicago Broad Axe, October 16, 1909, p. 2; Chicago Broad Axe, December 11, 1909, p. 2: articles on vaudeville at Pekin; incl. a group of 12, Joe Jordan and the Children of the Pekin, and a group of 9, Joe Jordan and his Nine Pekin Graduates, who head the bill and then go on the road on tour

1910, January: Lester Walton's "Theatrical Comment" column in the New York Age (NY Age, February 17, 1910, p. 6) discusses the utter lack of success last season (spring 1909) in plays without music, and subsequent parallel lack of success elsewhere. Then about the first of this year (i.e., 1910), the Pekin Stock Company went on the road to New Orleans and Memphis with three shows: The Man Up Stairs (revived from March 1909), Uncle's Baby, and In Montana, and quickly failed again. They were playing In Montana in Memphis when they got stranded in that city (Chicago Defender, January 29, 1910, p. 1)

NB: the Motts obit in 1911 mentions In Montana and Uncle's Baby. Is Uncle's Baby an Americanization of the 1863 British farce possibly by W. S. Gilbert ??, or the 1899 farce "My Uncle's Baby" a comedy drama by Mrs. Russell Bassett ??

1910, February: J. Ed. Green (1872-1910) dies Saturday, February 19, 1910 in Chicago [Sampson, Blacks in Blackface, pp. 74-76; obits, etc.; Chicago Defender, February 18, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, February 18, 1911, p. 5, marking the one-year anniversary]; this ends the Green and Brooks enterprise

1910, in April: still vaudeville in April 1910 (Defender)

1910, in May: Pekin running vaudeville as a continuous show, having shifted from two-a-day (Variety, May 7, 1910)

### **c. The Pekin, 1910-1911**

1910, fall season: vaudeville with tab shows until November; Sam Corker, Jr. steps in as manager of the theater; he will surface a

couple of years later at the Lafayette in New York (see below)

Motts's last venture in promoting musical comedy was this season (he dies after the end of this season, in mid 1911, a little more than a year after J. Ed. Green). He wanted to revive the stock company, and so after hiring Corker, he attracted the writer/actor/producer Jesse A. Shipp, who was at liberty after the end of the Williams & Walker era. Shipp was hired to write and produce. To anticipate a familiar result: Shipp "figured on producing a big comedy that would enjoy a run, [but] Mr. Motts wanted plays every week, a thing that was too much for a musical stock company; and after a few months duration, the company closed" (Motts obit, Indianapolis Freeman, July 15, 1911, p. 4).

NB: This is the very same season when Leubrie Hill and Will Vodery worked at the Howard in DC the fall creating shows for a resident company, then left that theater to take their shows on the road.

Hill and Vodery were a writer/composer team, while here in Chicago Shipp had no composer in residence, so the music was primarily drawn from pre-existing songs and arranged by pit orchestra member George Bailey.

1910, in July: a Defender article, "Future of the Pekin Theater," argues for hiring Jesse Shipp as manager, or as producer with Sam Corker as manager (Chicago Defender, July 29, 1911, p. 4).

1910, in September: Jesse Shipp writes a comedy, The Sanitarium, for the Pekin, which opened September 26; Charles Gilpin does the lead in blackface; reviewer Sylvester Russell writes "So long as the Pekin continues to put on these little artistic comedies with singing by the present very capable company of actors there is every reason to believe that this long established little theatre will continue on as usual." (Chicago Defender, October 1, 1910, p. 6).

1910, October: Jesse Shipp will come to Chicago to run the new company at the Pekin, which will soon have that company (Chicago Broad Axe, October 1, 1910, p. 2).

1910, in October: Jesse Shipp is announced as in Chicago, and he will be producing plays for the new stock company (Chicago Broad Axe, October 22, 1910, p. 3); they are expected to begin about

November 1 (Indianapolis Freeman, October 22, 1910, p. 5); in the end, the stock company's first show is October 31, as below

1910, in October: the Pekin last Monday [October 10] has vaudeville as usual but gives a taste of the coming new policy (Indianapolis Freeman, October 15, 1910, p. 5); Bauman says there was a farce this week, beginning Sunday, October 9, for which he cannot get a name, so maybe "the taste" is this farce.

1910, October: [from Monday October 17], vaudeville bill as usual, with a mini musical comedy in one act, The Census Taker, 45 minutes, by Jerry Mills with music composed by Sam Stewart (Indianapolis Freeman, October 22, 1910, p. 5).

1910, October: from October 24, vaudeville [no musical comedy, apparently].

#### FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE ALL-STAR COMPANY

1910, October: from Monday, October 31, in its first week, "the much heralded All Starr [sic] Cast made its first appearance Monday night" in Shipp's No Place Like Home, a one-act musical skit (with music by Sydney L. Perrin) plus an olio; ticket prices are raised, but it is amateurish, acc. Lewis, a critical reviewer, who complained that "It would be better to have vaudeville" (Indianapolis Freeman, November 5, 1910, p. 5, in somewhat negative reviewer, by Cary B. Lewis; see also Chicago Defender, November 5, 1910, p. 2, p. 4, more positive, by Sylvester Russell, and where he calls it the first of a series of one act comedies); Bauman dates it from Sunday, October 30

1910, in October and November: NB: Francis Eugene Mikell is brought up from Jacksonville's Globe Theatre to Chicago to work at the Pekin in October and November; did he come to work with Shipp as music director? Yes. Sylvester Russell column in Chicago Defender, November 26, 1910, p. 2: "Young Prof. Mikell of Jacksonville, Fla., who was enticed to come to Chicago by Sam Corker to be leader of the Pekin orchestra, without a contract, and then ignored by Motts, was given a position with one of Frazier & Carters companies. Now a certain Southern manager has sent him an offer as leader of orchestra in a large theatre which he will

probably accept." In December 1910 Mikell has left Chicago about a week ago, after visiting with his friend, composer William Dorsey, and the critic Sylvester Russell saw him to the train (Chicago Defender, December 10, 1910, p. 3); before long, in fact, he is back at the Globe in Jacksonville, working again for manager Frank Crowd (Indianapolis Freeman, December 24, 1910, p. 6).

1910, in November: from November 7, there is a mini-musical, a one-act farce comedy by Shipp, A Dark Mystery, on the vaudeville bill, preceded by two white acts, with music arranged by Bailey (Chicago Defender, November 12, 1912, p. 2); the placement of the mini after some shorter acts is standard, apparently; this article may be the first appearance of Sylvester Russell's by-line this season in the Defender.

In the Freeman of November 12, the reviewer is not Sylvester Russell, and a long note (p. 4) on Chicago theater mentions the Grand and the Monogram but not the Pekin]; Russell first appears in the Freeman on December 3 and December 10, but without paying any attention to the local southside Chicago theaters; Bauman teases apart the whole problem with reviewers

1910, in November: from November 14, continuing in vaudeville, but there is a [mini] comedy at the Pekin as part of the bill; evidently, when it is a mini they do not always bother to provide the name, or else because it is a continuation (?) (Chicago Defender, November 19, 1910, p. 2); acc. Bauman, it is a continuation of A Dark Mystery.

In the Indianapolis Freeman of November 19, the reviewer is not Sylvester Russell, and a long note (p. 5) on Chicago theater mentions the Grand and the Monogram but not the Pekin; further, in response to readers, it is explained that the reviewer has not reviewed the Pekin because a previous critical review resulted in the fact that they were not offered tickets.

1910, in November: from November 21, Jesse A. Shipp's play, A Night in New York's Chinatown, his second big production, by one statement, but the company's first full-length "entire" production by another statement, a discrepancy on account of the apparent slightness of No Place Like Home; or its successor, A Dark

Mystery; still a short show, though: a playlet in two acts, 11 musical numbers; said to have run for a fortnight but evidently went into a third week, thus from November 21 to December 11, 1910, "a comedy and pantomime of lowly life" (Indianapolis Freeman, December 17, 1910, p. 5); a big article with a review of the Thursday, November 24 performance, with cast and list of musical numbers, in the Chicago Defender, November 26, 1910, p. 3; big article in Chicago Broad Axe, November 26, 1910, p. 2, calls the company the "All Star Stock Company" and says Joe Jordan contributed "a ragtime gem" written for Fanny Wise; the Indianapolis Freeman of November 26 has no Chicago theatrical news at all; mention of Pekin Musical Stock Company in Variety, November 26, 1910).

Shipp puts on this show at the Lafayette in 1914, and his Seeing Chinatown there with the Lafayette Players in 1919 is probably related (NY Age, January 11, 1919, p. 6; NY Age, January 18, 1919, p. 6)

1910, in November: from November 28, A Night in New York's Chinatown continues for a second week; Sylvester Russell turns up as reporter for Chicago theater news in the Indianapolis Freeman of December 3, but says nothing about the local southside theaters

1910, in December: From a Sunday matinee on December 4, the Smart Set comes to town with His Honor, the Barber, playing at the Globe for two weeks and featuring Aida Overton Walker (Indianapolis Freeman, December 10, 1910, p. 5)

1910, in December: from December 5, A Night in New York's Chinatown continues for a third week; Sylvester Russell is the reporter for Chicago theater news in the Indianapolis Freeman of December 10, but says nothing about the local southside theaters

1910, in December: from December 12, a gap in the reporting; Bauman book gives A Trip to Jamatu

I had thought either A Night in New York's Chinatown kept going or perhaps the musical comedy could be Lime Kiln Klub as a mini/skit/act on a vaudeville bill again; in fact, Lime Kiln's March

1911 appearance is called its "re-appearance for the second time" and that makes most sense if the March appearance is its third time around this season (the second of two revivals), but it may not pay to examine this language too closely; apparently quarrels over reviewers and their free passes are a problem that caused a lack of mention in the press in December (e.g., Indianapolis Freeman, December 24, 1910, supplement, p. 12)

CHECK AGAIN [Defender/Freeman of December 17??; NB: the Freeman of December 24 is the big end-of-year issue]

Sylvester Russell, in Freeman, December 17, p. 5, reports at length on Chinatown at the end of its run, but does not say what replaced it

1910, in December: for a second week, from December 19, Jesse Shipp's, A Trip to Jamater (a mis-hearing of Jamatu?); seems to be another big show, an operatic comedy; it is in its second week's run (Indianapolis Freeman, December 31, 1910, p. 7)

Called A Trip to Jamatu, it is revived by Shipp in NYC in the fall of 1912 in a production by a neighborhood club at Young's Casino on Thursday, September 26, 1912, and there it has an embedded minstrel show that includes several musical numbers (NY Age, September 5, 1912, p. 8; NY Age, October 3, 1912, [n.p.]; NY Age, October 10, 1912, p. 8); then there is another revival of A Trip to Jamatu/Jamaica by Shipp at the Lafayette in May 1913 in a revised version (Indianapolis Freeman, May 3, 1913, p. 5)

1910, December: from December 26, Bauman book gives The Lime Kiln Club here, for one week; done again by the company in March and May; Chicagoans are demanding its return (Chicago Defender, January 28, 1911, p. 3)

Note Will Marion Cook's pioneering use of this name and material dating to the summer of 1909 (NY Age, September 16, 1909, p. 6); Shipp re-uses the premise in a production for the Frogs on Monday, January 29, 1912 (NY Age, February 1, 1912, p. 6) and at

the Lafayette in 1913, and 1919 with the Lafayette Players; Bert Williams stars in a film of this name

- 1911, in January: from January 2, no evident title offered, Jesse A. Shipp presents a country school farce (Chicago Defender, January 7, 1911, p. 3); Bauman book supports the assumption that the title is, in fact, A Country School Farce. NB: the Defender article is reprinted in the Indianapolis Freeman for February 11, with loss of later show's name; the Freeman subhead for this show, though, affirms the title
- 1911, January: from January 9, in store this week at the Pekin is Jesse A. Shipp's Going to the Circus (Chicago Defender, January 14, 1911, p. 4)
- 1911, January: from January 16, Shipp's Lost and Found opened last Monday night, music arranged by Dr. Fred Burch and George Bailey (Indianapolis Freeman, January 21, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Defender, January 21, 1911, p. 3)
- 1911, January: from January 23, Jesse A. Shipp's Dr. Herb's Prescription, or, It Happened in a Dream, a musical farce comedy starring Shelton Brooks in his first leading role, opened last Monday (Indianapolis Freeman, January 28, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Defender, January 28, 1911, p. 3)
- 1911, January: demand for return of Lime Kiln Club, which made the biggest hit this season [at Christmas time] (Chicago Defender, January 28, 1911, p. 3)
- 1911, in January: from January 30, Jesse A. Shipp's new Pekin show, The S. S. Hotel, or The Sea Shore Hotel or See Sure Hotel or Sara Smith Hotel (Chicago Defender, February 4, 1911, p. 3)
- 1911, February: from February 6, Bauman book provides revival of A Country School Farce (NB: the Chicago Defender article of January 7 is reprinted in the Indianapolis Freeman for February 11, with consequent loss of this week's show's name)
- 1911, in February: from February 13, Shipp's merry farce, Psycho-Gaserino, opened last Monday with songs arranged by George Bailey, a trombonist in the orchestra, starring Brooks and Gilman and featuring also Charles Gilpin, Billy Johnson, Jerry Mills, Lottie



Grady, etc. (Chicago Defender, February 18, 1911, p. 3;  
Indianapolis Freeman, February 18, 1911, p. 5)

1911, in February: from February 20, Jesse Shipp's unnamed two-act farce comedy (Indianapolis Freeman, February 25, 1911, p. 5) [one of those revived at the Lafayette?]; Bauman book cannot come up with the name; microfilm of Chicago Defender, February 4, 1911, p. 3 is damaged in ProQuest but a partially visible comment says "Dr. - - -" made a big hit last week and will be repeated; this is a reference to the January 23 show, "Dr. Herb's Prescription," and that may be the show that played here in this slot

1911, in February: from February 27, mid January's show, Lost and Found, is repeated at the Pekin (Indianapolis Freeman, March 4, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Defender, March 4, 1911, p. 4)

1911, in March: from March 6, Shipp's The Lime Kiln Club makes a hit at the Pekin in its re-appearance for the second time (Chicago Defender, March 11, 1911, p. 3)

1911, in March: from March 13, Jesse Shipp mini comedy, The Test, with some music (Chicago Defender, March 18, 1911, p. 3); it was condensed into two acts, giving time for movies and wrestling matches

1911, in March: from March 20, The Sanitarium, a Jesse A. Shipp comedy, opened last Monday (Indianapolis Freeman, March 25, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Defender, March 25, 1911, p. 6); this first played in late September

1911, in March: from March 27, Jesse Shipp's Near the Camp, a musical farce comedy (Indianapolis Freeman, April 1, p. 5); presumably running to April 2; this is the end of the big run for the company and ends the series of Shipp shows

Gap in musicals of one month

1911, in April: from April 3, a special singing feature, called "a minstrel show, including the female contingent" (Indianapolis Freeman, April 8, p. 5; Chicago Defender, April 8, 1911, p. 3)

1911, in April: from April 10, Pekin is closed this week and will re-open with a white company in Lost Paradise next Monday [April 17];

moreover, "the Pekin Stock Company will play a loop-cycle of city theaters and return to Mott's theater in turn with a production of "Sons of Ham," by Jesse A. Shipp" (Chicago Defender, April 15, 1911, p. 6; Chicago Defender, April 22, 1911, p. 4)

1911, in April: from April 17, for two weeks, a white company, the Howard Amusement Company; for week 1, it does David Belasco's The Lost Paradise (Chicago Broad Axe, April 15, 1911, p. 2); it opened Monday, April 24, for its second week, doing The Belle of Richmond (Chicago Broad Axe, April 22, 1911, p. 2; Chicago Defender, April 29, 1911, p. 5); its third offering, The Man of Mystery, opened the Monday before May 6, 1911 (Chicago Defender, May 6, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, May 6, 1911, p. 4) and ran three weeks

1911, in May: from Monday evening, May 1, for two weeks, the Pekin Stock Company opened at Chicago's Globe Theater in The Lime Kiln Klub [or Club], a farce comedy by Jesse A. Shipp, originally produced at the Pekin in two acts but now expanded to 18 song hits, three acts, and with a company expanded to 30 people for the move to the Globe, with music arranged by George Bailey (Chicago Broad Ax, April 29, 1911, p. 2; Chicago Defender, April 29, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Tribune, April 30, 1911, p. B2; Indianapolis Freeman, May 6, 1911, p. 1, 4; Chicago Defender, May 6, 1911, p. 4) acc. the NY Age on May 4, they are in their third week on tour through the Chicago theaters, which would mean they began in the week of Monday, April 17 (NY Age, May 4, 1911, p. 6); see also the NY Dramatic Mirror, May 10, 1911, p. 16; possibly they did do some kind of tour through the theaters, though I cannot find this, but when they get to the Globe it is thought they would stay there indefinitely (Freeman, May 6)

1911, in May: After they finished at the Globe, the Pekin company "opened in a song review as the last appearance of the famous Pekin stock company upon its own stage"; this would have to be some time in the second week of May; Bauman says an expanded Lime Kiln plays for two weeks, so this review could be from ca. May 15 (Indianapolis Freeman, July 15, 1911, p. 4)

1911, in May: the stock company is disbanded (NY Age, Thursday, May 18, 1911, p. 8: Pekin Stock Co. disbands)

- 1911, in May: at the end of the season Shipp goes to Michigan for a two-week vacation (Indianapolis Freeman, May 20, 1911, p. 5)
- 1911, in May: vaudeville begins Monday, May 15, with one show a night (Chicago Defender, May 13, 1911, p. 4); but on Monday May 22 they return to two shows a night (Chicago Defender, May 20, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, May 20, 1911, p. 5)
- 1911, in May: filling out the Pekin bill with vaudeville (Indianapolis Freeman, May 27, 1911, p. 5; Chicago Defender, May 27, 1911, p. 3)
- 1911, in July: Robert T. Motts dies the Monday before July 22, 1911. Funeral was the Thursday before July 22, 1911 (Chicago Defender, July 22, 1911, p. 7); Motts obituary in Freeman (Indianapolis Freeman, July 15, 1911, pp. 1, 4); memorial service Sunday evening, August 13, 1911 with lots of big names, including Bert Williams, J. Rosamond Johnson, etc. (Indianapolis Freeman, August 12, 1911, p. 5)
- 1911, in July: big article on the future of the Pekin, proposing Jesse Shipp or Sam Corker or Salem Tutt Whitney as manager, and a winter season of musical comedies, each running 2-4 weeks (Chicago Defender, July 29, 1911, p. 4)

#### **d. The Pekin, 1911-1912**

The 1911-1912 season at the Pekin more or less can be followed in the Sylvester Russell column for the Indianapolis Freeman, "Chicago Weekly Review"; basically, just a fall season; its backbone is colored vaudeville, but that is leavened by a number of full-length spoken dramas by an amateur stock company and a couple of stagings of musicals, mainly by touring companies.

1911, September-October: first big drama, Tallaboo (or "Swept By Fire to Fame and Fortune"), by Mr. N. R. Harper (or I. N. Harper, or H. R. Harper, a well-known colored lawyer of Louisville, KY); a genuine Negro melodrama in five acts with music; much anticipated, and gets lots of press all year; announced in February, expected to be done professionally in Chicago, then produced in June by a Louisville company in the Houston Theatre for a week

from June 12 (Indianapolis Freeman, February 25, 1911, p. 1; Indianapolis Freeman, May 20, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, June 3, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, June 10, 1911, p. 1; Indianapolis Freeman, July 8, 1911, p. 7)

In Chicago, originally to have played at Institutional Church, 3825 Dearborn, for one week beginning August 28, then postponed until about September 15, when it would be presented on an elaborate scale (Chicago Broad Axe, August 19, 1911, p. 1; Chicago Broad Axe, August 26, 1911, p. 2)

It becomes the first of four/five fall dramas at the Pekin; ran September 5, 6, 7, 1911 (Indianapolis Freeman, September 16, 1911, p. 5); then runs Monday-Friday, September 18-22, and a matinee on Saturday, September 23 (Chicago Broad Axe, September 23, 1911, p. 1; Indianapolis Freeman, September 23, 1911, p. 4; Indianapolis Freeman, September 30, 1911, p. 5); then taken off, and a demand is heard for its return (Chicago Broad Axe, October 7, 1911, p. 2); opened again Monday, Oct. 9, and again from October 16 to 22 for its farewell week (Indianapolis Freeman, October 14, 1911, p. 4; Chicago Broad Axe, October 21, 1911, p. 2; "'Tallaboo' continues to Draw": Indianapolis Freeman, October 21, 1911, p. 5)

1911, September: special vaudeville at Pekin on Saturday and Sunday, September 23 and 24, and then Mott's's season officially opens with vaudeville from Monday, September 25 (Chicago Broad Axe, September 23, 1911, p. 1)

1911, October: beginning Monday, October 23, a one-week revival of The Mayor of Dixie with a new score of music and songs, music by Tom Lemonier, mounted by Gilpin and Co. (Chicago Defender, October 21, 1911, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, November 4, 1911, p. 4)

1911, in November: second big drama, The Bogus Prince of Hayti, by Mr. A. Lincoln Harris, to begin next Monday [Nov. 6], [probably for two weeks?; Bauman says for two weeks] (Chicago Broad Axe, November 4, 1911, p. 4); according to Sylvester Russell in the Freeman, this is a revival (Indianapolis Freeman, October 21, 1911, p. 5), and see his review in Indianapolis Freeman,

November 18, 1911, p. 6; definitely so, since the play was written in 1903 (see long column by A. Lincoln Harris on "Why I Wrote It" in Freeman, May 6, 1911, p. 6)

- 1911, in November: a road company coming in for a week with Hottest Coon in Dixie commencing Monday, November 20 (Chicago Defender, November 18, 1911, p. 8; Broad Axe, November 18, 1911, p. 2)
- 1911, in November: third big drama, Carib; originally announced as coming the Monday after Nov. 18, i.e., Nov. 20, for a two weeks engagement but then Hottest Coon in Dixie company comes in for a week, and so in fact this play commenced Monday, November 27 and ran two weeks; Carib [or The Carib], by Mr. Terrevious L. Douglas; "A Real Drama in 3 Acts"; "Strong in Every Day Life" (Chicago Broad Axe, November 18, 1911, p. 6, 7; Chicago Broad Axe, December 9, 1911, p. 2; Indianapolis Freeman, December 9, 1911, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, December 23, 1911, p. 19)
- 1911, in December: fourth big drama, Ahead of the Times, by Edward J. McCoo [December 11-24], commenced Monday, December 11 (Chicago Defender, December 9, 1911, p. 6; Chicago Broad Ax, December 9, 1911, p. 1)), and ran two weeks, so it is in its last week at Pekin just before Christmas (Indianapolis Freeman, December 23, 1911, p. 19)
- 1911, in December: announced that Tallaboo would be revived Monday, Christmas Day, to run for a week (Indianapolis Freeman, December 23, 1911, p. 19; Chicago Broad Axe, December 30, 1911, p. 2)
- 1912, in January: A fifth drama, Mrs. George W. Lacey's A Slave's Revenge, opening midnite December 31 (Bauman has January 1), with the author acting in the company for a week (Indianapolis Freeman, January 6, 1912, p. 4)
- 1912, in January: Pekin Theater is closed pending a decision in the first suit concerning Motts's estate (Indianapolis Freeman, January 27, 1912, p. 5); when it re-opens (see below), there is no drama or locally staged musicals

1912, in February: theater re-opens with mixed bills, wrestling, vaudeville, etc. Hottest Coon in Dixie comes through on Feb. 19 for a week with the big national touring company

1912, in April: My Friend From Dixie comes through April 22 for a week, with the big national touring company

### **The Lafayette Theatre and the Lafayette Players in the 1910s**

In general, on the Lafayette Players, see Hill and Hatch, A History of African American Theatre (2003), pp. 202-206 and Sister Mary Francesca Thompson, "The Lafayette Players: 1915-1932" (PhD, University of Michigan, 1972).

Cook is a major figure in the move to establish a black repertory company at the Lafayette in the 1910s and to bring drama with black actors onto its stage. He contributed shows for the company in 1913, oversaw a revival of Clorindy in 1914, and then mounted Darkydom in 1915. Further, in the 1913 push, Jesse Shipp mounted his 1910-1911 Pekin shows there. The following account is a narrative from 1912 to 1920 that is offered to help contextualize Cook's role. Moreover, his ex-wife, Abbie Mitchell, figured prominently in starring roles in the Lafayette Players from 1916 to 1920, when she left to join her ex-husband on stage in Europe.

The Lafayette was situated on the east side of 7th Ave. in the middle of the block between 131st and 132nd. For short, it is described alternatively either as at 132nd and 7th or at 131st and 7th.

Opening in November 1912, this neighborhood theatre was subject to the same demographic, geographic, and economic factors that defined the markets and economic viability of any theater. As a local house serving its neighborhood, it exhausted its audience quickly and had to refresh its offerings one or twice a week. If it could manage to attract a wider, more cosmopolitan following, then acts could remain in house for longer periods. On the strength of this possibility, moving to the creation of a resident company was a strategic move. Given a weekly schedule, however, establishing a resident stock company was a big step and made huge demands on both the performers and the creative team

to create, learn, rehearse, and present new material on a weekly basis.

Instead of maintaining a single resident stock company, having several companies on the road at once, rotating through a number of theaters in different cities, was easier on the performers, since a given show could be performed for a longer stretch of time, but this kind of schedule would continue to put big demands on the creative team. In Harlem in the 1910s these were fundamental issues, as they had been just a half decade earlier at Chicago's Pekin. And how they were addressed would depend on your point of view. For example, if you first and foremost were a proponent of serious black theater, then the question became whether any theater could support a resident stock company (or if any syndicate could support several companies on the road at once). An alternative would be to create a fully itinerant road company presenting black actors in serious theater, with perhaps several plays in their repertory.

In following the travails of successive management teams and companies at the Lafayette (below), the opposing tugs of keeping a company going and of keeping a house going are constantly at work.

One of the key figures supporting what was happening at the Lafayette was Will Marion Cook, who was part of a circle that included newspaperman, lyricist, and manager Lester Walton, and creative figures Jesse Shipp, Alex Rogers, Henry S. Creamer, and Chris Smith, many of whom lived nearby.

### **The Lafayette, 1912-1913**

1912, in November: The Lafayette theater opened in November 1912. It was initially a white theater, under white management, and for mainly white audiences (according to a NY Times article, November 11, 1990, at this moment 132nd Street was black but 131st Street was still white). In August 1914, it was described as at the edge of the colored residential district (NY Age, August 20, 1914, n.p. [6]); the theatre was at first "Not For Colored," and it bent this policy only enough to portion off a part of the house for colored patrons.

From 1912-1914 the house was leased to the promoters Martinson and Niber; they were followed by Morgenstern and Walton in 1914 (as below).

1913, in February: In early 1913, not long after opening its doors, the colored policy changed and the Lafayette became one of the first, if not the very first, of New York theatres to desegregate. Beginning in February 1913 the theater had black acts, aimed to draw black audiences, and eventually installed black ushers and orchestra. However, it was by no means an all-black house after that and continued to draw white patrons (NY Age, May 8, 1913, n.p. [6]: whites and blacks are sitting side-by-side; NY Age, May 20, 1915, p. [6], white patrons sit next to black patrons).

NB: status of Sundays needs tracing at the Lafayette; in fall 1919 they were having Sunday concerts but not theatre.

1913, in March: in light of the new racial policy, Lester Walton and others promptly started the Lafayette Amusement Company, and an ensemble was formed, a stock company for musical comedy (note: not for serious drama) called The Negro Players, including Abbie Mitchell, Grace Lee Cook, Chris Smith, Billy Harper, "Boots" Allen, and William Shelton. This is taking the first opportunity to do a "Pekin Chicago-type" resident musical stock company run by African Americans in New York City. Rogers, Creamer, Cook, and Smith are the creative team, and then Jesse Shipp also joins. This is creme de la creme talent.

With some bumps (see below), this particular group only survived for about two months, into May, but the house supports some kind of resident company for musical skits and one-acts (not more elaborate tabs), under one or another creative team, especially led by Harrison Stewart, for a couple of years, until the shift in management and the institution of another resident troupe for staged dramas, the Lafayette Players, in February/March 1916 (see below).

1913, in March: on Monday, March 17, 1913, The Traitor was produced, with the creative team of Creamer, Rogers, and Cook. Lester



Walton's column says the talent includes Rogers and Creamer for the book, Cook and Chris Smith for songs, Abbie Mitchell for the most ambitious vocal work, and Billy Harper as the leading comedian (NY Age, March 20, 1913, n.p. [6]). Then Creamer and Rogers broke off to do their own thing, as below, and Jesse Shipp stepped in, also as below. Walton, in his Thursday review in that first week (NY Age, Thursday, March 20, 1913, n.p. [6]) already sounds a note of worry; he is hoping that that the troupe "does not break up before the week is up over trivial matters." He undoubtedly knew about back stage problems. (One has to wonder if the ever-cantankerous Cook was making waves.) The troupe's demise was announced a week later (NY Age, Thursday, March 27, 1913, n.p. [6]).

1913, in March: on March 24, just vaudeville and movies

1913, in March: on March 31, just vaudeville and movies

1913, in April: on April 7, Whitney and Tutt bring their current show, His Excellency the Mayor, cut to a tab running fifty minutes instead of two-and-a-half hours, to the Lafayette (NY Age, April 10, 1913, n.p. [6])

1913, in April: **The Lafayette Players**; on Monday, April 14, a new ensemble appears, described as another house stock company show, now under the name "The Lafayette Players, unincumbered (sic) by any additional references, such as "Negro," "Afro-American" or "colored"." Here begins four weeks of shows (musical comedies) by this troupe.

1913, in April: The first show of the new ensemble was the second contribution this spring by Cook; called Soldiers? (sic), in two twenty-minute acts, with a creative team of Jesse A. Shipp, R. C. McPherson, and Cook. The company included Billy Harper, Allie Gillan, Sterling Rex, Frank de Lyons, Ada Guignesse [Guy], Elizabeth Williams, Blanche Kelley, Grace Lee Cook, etc.

NB: the house got female colored ushers at this time

NB: after this show the hand of Cook is not really evident in Lafayette affairs for about a year, until the spring 1914 revival of Clorindy (see below).

Following Cook's show, Jesse Shipp revived a number of his two-act shows from the 1910-1911 Chicago Pekin season for **The Lafayette Players**:

1913, in April: on April 21, Shipp's A Trip to Jamatu (or Jamaica in Indianapolis Freeman, May 3, 1913, p. 5)

1913, in April: on April 28, Shipp's The S. S. Hotel

1913, in May: on May 5, closing May 11, two sketches by Shipp, They Came Back ("being given without music") and A Ticket or a Squigilum (NY Age, May 8, 1913, n.p. [6]); these might be two missing titles of shows created for the 1910-1911 season at the Pekin; They Came Back was staged again later that summer as the afterpiece for the big Frogs tour of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, and DC in August 1913 (NY Age, August 14, 1913, n.p. [6]);

Googling "squigilum" gets a couple of hits but not for this show--- is it some kind of theatrical slang term? (W. C. Fields uses it in a movie for a kind of nonsense "game.") Seems most likely to be a short bit of broad comedy for a solo performer. The title "A Ticket for a Squigilum" suggests a relationship with "A Dollar for a Squigilum" as below. And a much earlier hit (Keytesville (Mo.) Chariton Courier, February 22, 1879, p. 2) associates the same kind of things, in a context that suggests a bit of nonsense: "Two dollars, ticket, squigilum or show your Gem."

At the Lafayette, the NY Age says: "Sketch No. 2 is "A Ticket or a Squigilum," with Billy Harper as the leading comedy figure. Those who saw the late Ernest Hogan in "Rufus Rastus" could not help thinking of the "Unbleached American's" work in the "a ticket or a squigilum" scene." (NY Age, May 8, 1913, n.p. [6])

In a 1911 theater column: "Well, well, well. I nearly forgot. Who

do you think wa in town? LEM WELCH. Yes, sir, he was here with his walking suit and cane and diamonds. Yes, sir, he's doing a four act, the "Welch Comedy Four," and has a brand new act and idea that he put together himself, namely, "Shadow: or, the Coming Man." He admits he has a little of "Razor Jim," "The Doctor Shop," "A Dollar for a Squigilum," "Ghost in the Pawnshop." But outside of this his stuff is all original." (NY Clipper, May 7, 1911, p. 311)

The run of Shipp shows ends now, and apparently so does the present resident company called "The Lafayette Players." In just under a year, Shipp will return briefly as manager, with Corker, thus reassembling Chicago's Pekin theatre team of 1910-11.

1913, in May: Meanwhile, elsewhere, a separate new travelling troupe gets going under the name **The Negro Players**, first performing at the Casino Theatre in Philadelphia on Monday, May 12, for two weeks. They took some personnel from the cast and creative team---as well as laying claim to the original name of the house company---from the troupe begun at the Lafayette in March. Their new vehicle is The Old Man's Boy, a dramatic play in three acts with some musical numbers (songs and dances), but evidently fairly compact in overall length. It is the dream of Alex Rogers and Henry S. Creamer, who act as well as direct, and Harrison Stewart is the big star, while James Reese Europe conducts. Rogers wrote the book while Creamer composed a number of the songs, and he choreographed all of the dances. The formation of this company is announced May 1 (NY Age, May 1, 1913, n.p. [6]; NY Age, May 8, 1913, n.p. [6]). This will be a touring company, not a resident stock company, which solves the problem of the need to relentlessly create and rehearse new shows.

1913, in later May and June: at the Lafayette, mainly just vaudeville

1913, in June: at the Lafayette, vaudeville and a comedy sketch, Other People's Money, in the week of June 9, presented by Martin and Company (NY Age, Thursday, June 12, 1913, n.p. [6])

1913, in June: The Old Man's Boy leaves Philadelphia at the end of May and plays at the Empire in Brooklyn from June 2; it is "a little

negro play with music," with an orchestra under the baton of Marie Lucas (NY Sun, June 7, 1913, p. 7; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 3, 1913, p. 8);

then it is at the Lafayette from Monday, June 16, for a week, a special engagement with shows given twice a day as "the extra attraction," so it is tab-sized, i.e., "An Original Little Play in Three Acts" and "Positively a New Idea in Negro Shows" (NY Age, Thursday, June 12, 1913, n.p. [6]; NY Age, Thursday, June 19, 1913, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, June 28, 1913, p. 5); at the Lafayette the players included lots of Harlemites, as Walton observes; they were Harrison Stewart, Viola E. Stewart, Charles Gilpin, Andrew Copeland, Henry S. Creamer, Robert Murray, Andrew Bishop, Harold Parker, Cassie Norwood, Bessie Payne, Lavina Rogers, Jessie Ellis, Alice Gorgas, etc., with an augmented orchestra under Marie Lucas. Henry Creamer staged the dance numbers.

NB: some analysis of names would be in order; is there an intersecting set of personnel, or fairly distinct? Which group ends up at the core of the later Lafayette Players, if this is even a fair question?

NB: James Reese Europe had done the Philadelphia conducting and then turned over the baton to Marie Lucas, who will later conduct "Europe's Lady Orchestra" (NY Age, Thursday, December 3, 1914, n.p. [6]).

1913, in July: The Old Man's Boy is mounted one night only at a big benefit at the Manhattan Casino on Tuesday, July 22, with the same company, called the Negro Players in one announcement but now called "The Pioneer Negro Amusement Company" in another; at this event, the show is called a little playlet (NY Age, July 24, 1913, n.p. [6]).

1913, in August: Some members of The Negro Players participated in the August 1913 tour of the Frogs: six men and six women doing Creamer's terpsichorean specialties (NY Age, August 14, 1913, n.p. [6]).

## The Lafayette, 1913-1914

1913, in October: in the second fall season at the Lafayette, from October 6, there is mainly a diet of vaudeville and revivals. Harrison Stewart did a vaudeville act in the week of October 6---his "school act" (NY Age, Thursday, October 9, 1913, n.p. [6]); and then Stewart and the Harrison Stewart Stock Company lead the bill with a "big colored one-act" in the week of Monday, October 13 (NY Age, Thursday, October 16, 1913, n.p. [6]), and stage similar one-acts throughout the season. They had a run of six weeks at the Lafayette, including Two Boys from Home.

1913, in October: The Old Man's Boy comes back to the Lafayette, "radically changed", for the week of Monday, October 20, 1913; the company is smaller but the show is larger; without Harrison Stewart, but with most of the rest of the spring cast---Alex Rogers, Charles Gilpin, Lavinia Rogers, Andrew Bishop, Billy Harper, Alice Gorgas, Ruth Cherry, Grayce Lee-Cook, Jessie Ellis, Henry S. Creamer, and musical director Marie Lucas (NY Age, Thursday, October 16, 1913, n.p. [6]; NY Age, Thursday, October 23, 1913, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, November 1, 1913, p. 5).

NB: After playing at the Lafayette, The Old Man's Boy is revised and goes on tour from the fall of 1913 into February 1914, advertised as featuring "Rogers & Creamer's Negro Players of America." They are to go out November 1 for a thirty-week tour ending May 23 (NY Clipper, November 1, 1913, p. 5). "The Negro Players of America" (Billy Harper, Alex Rogers, Grace LeCook, Ruth Cherry, Charles S. Gilpin, Alice Georgas, etc.) take the revived The Old Man's Boy on the road in 1914 to Columbia (SC) & Charleston & Washington in January, etc. E.g., they were at the Howard in DC for a week from January 26, 1914, advertised as the "Greatest Colored Show on Earth" with 25 big musical song hits, forty singers, dancers, jesters.

NB: the size of this particular show needs to be evaluated at every reference (i.e., for every production, as a tab or as a big show).

1913, in October: at the Lafayette, next, for two weeks from October 27 and November 3, J. Leubrie Hill's revived musical troupe, the Darktown Follies Co., brings My Friend from Kentucky to the Lafayette with J. Leubrie Hill, Julius Glenn, Abbie Mitchell, etc., etc. (NY Age, October 16, 1913, n.p. [6]; NY Age, October 23, 1913, n.p. [6]; NY Age, November 13, 1913, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, November 15, 1913, p. 6).

1913, in November: Harrison Stewart and his stock company play two weeks at the Lafayette, from November 10 and November 17, and a new show is expected to be mounted in two weeks (i.e., after the Leubrie Hill return run beginning the 24th), for which he advertises for chorus of 20 men and a chorus of 20 women; in the earlier November run, the company of 17 includes Harrison Stewart, Viola Stewart, Blanche Deas, Hattie Burris, Jim Burris, Chris Smith, Boots Allen, Jokey Murray, Charlie Payne, Pete Williams, Riley Gibson, Harold Parker, Beulah Bishop, Bell Morgan, Maude Jones, Marie Ray, and Frances Woods (NY Age, Nov. 20, 1913, n.p. [6]); the first of the shows is The Private Bullet-Head, with Harrison Stewart, Viola Stewart, B. Morgan, Hattie Burris, Boots Allen, J. Murray, Maude Jones, Blanche Deas, J. Burris and Chris Smith (Indianapolis Freeman, November 15, 1913, p. 6); the second of the shows is called Two Boys From Home, and two numbers from it are Stewart's "Get That Idea Out of Your Head," and Maude Jones's "Just to Be Around Salvation Nell" (Indianapolis Freeman, November 29, 1913, p. 4)

NB: in early 1914: Stewart and Company are at the Howard Theater in DC in the week of January 19-25, 1914 (Indianapolis Freeman, January 24, 1914, p. 6; (Washington Bee, January 24, 1914, p. 5); Harrison Stewart and his company of ten are on the road with a show called The Bootblack Parlor (Bridgeton (NJ) Evening News, February 18, 1914, p. 4; Bridgeton (NJ) Evening News, February 20, 1914, p. 6); they are in Boston in April (Boston Herald, April 26, 1914, p. 32)

1913, in December: at the Lafayette, the week of December 1 is the second week of a return engagement for Leubrie Hill and Co. beginning November 24, and they will be further “held over for a limited engagement” beginning December 8 for a third week of My Friend From Kentucky and “My Friend From the Lafayette Theatre,” and they eventually run to December 20 (NY Age, December 4, 1913, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, December 6, 1913, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, December 13, 1913, p. 5; NY Age, December 18, 1913, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, December 27, 1913, p. 5).

1913, in December: My Friend From Kentucky finally closes on Saturday, December 20, and then the Lafayette forsakes vaudeville and musical comedy for spectacular melodrama, putting on The Outlaw’s Christmas with an all-star cast beginning the week of Monday, December 22, and then Dealers in White Women in the week of Monday, December 29; these are two familiar plays on the NY stage (NY Age, December 18, 1913, n.p. [6])

1914, in late January or early February: the first big change in management, beginning the Shipp era---it is announced that Shipp and Corker are going to be engaged to manage the Lafayette (Indianapolis Freeman, February 7, 1914, p. 5); their first production is to be a February 9 revival of Will Marion Cook’s Clorindy.

NB: just to anticipate---tragically, Corker would die in an accidental fall from a ladder in August (NY Age, August 20, 1914, n.p. [6]).

1914, in February: Cook's Clorindy is revived at the Lafayette for two weeks, i.e., the weeks of Monday, February 9 and 16; the NY Age, February 12, n.p. [6] says Clorindy could be expanded to three acts, and the NY Age, February 19, n.p. [6] says it would be a strong vaudeville attraction as is on any circuit.

1914, in February: after Clorindy, in the week of Monday, February 23, a revival of Shipp's A Night in Chinatown (his 1910 Pekin show),

"which he wrote a number of years ago" (NY Age, February 19, 1914, p. [6]).

1914, in March: the Shipp/Corker era at Lafayette ends abruptly and prematurely, after only about a month (Indianapolis Freeman, March 7, 1914, p. 6); evidently burned, Shipp would later warn Laura Bush that the time was not ripe (Thompson thesis, p. 13).

1914, in March: with the change of management, the Lafayette goes back to vaudeville with tabs; Harrison Stewart and Co. were at the Lafayette last week, and last week Dudley brings a "big" act with 15 people to the Lafayette called Joining the Show (Indianapolis Freeman, March 28, 1914, p. 5).

1914, in May: after about two years Martinson & Nibur relinquished their leasehold on the theater because they could not pay its rent, and the house is described as at the edge of the colored residential district (NY Age, August 20, 1914, n.p. [6]);

a new management/production team at the Lafayette, its third (after M&N and Shipp/Corker), consisting of Morgenstern and Lester Walton, takes over; they will be in charge for about two years, until February 1916; for at least part of the time, Walton co-manages with Eugene Elmore.

1914, in May: from Monday, May 25, Whitney & Tutt's The Smart Set appears in their touring production of The Wrong Mr. President

1914, in June: in the week of Monday, June 15, a vaudeville bill including both S. H. Dudley and his mule, and also Abbie Mitchell with Will Marion Cook (NY Age, Thursday, June 18, 1914, n.p. [6])

1914, in June: Morganstern & Walton announce that from Monday, June 22, instead of just vaudeville, they are going to feature dramatic sketches at the Lafayette, the first of them being a comedy sketch, The Real Estate Agent, with Harrison Stewart and his wife Viola Steward, plus Charles H. Gilpin and Blanche Deas; the significance here is that the troupe will not just do singing and dancing, but also straight acting ("it being the aim of Messers. Morganstern &



Walton to make the Lafayette Theatre an institution where ambitious and promising colored performers may find encouragement along other lines than merely singing and dancing"); the skit originally had two musical numbers, but the songs were dropped after the second performance (NY Age, Thursday, June 18, 1914, n.p. [6]; NY Age, Thursday, June 25, 1914, n.p. [6])

1914, in July: from July 6 at the Lafayette, vaudeville including Harrison Steward in a humorous sketch, My Landlady, with the cast of four as above, including his wife Viola Steward plus Charles Gilpin and Blanche Deas (NY Age, July 9, 1914, n.p. [6])

1914, in July: Leubrie Hill and Darktown Follies return to the Lafayette in the weeks of July 20 and July 27 with their touring production of My Friend From Kentucky; the whole show runs twice daily and the rest of the time there are continuous movies (NY Age, July 16, 1914, n.p.; NY Age, July 23, 1914, n.p.; Indianapolis Freeman, July 25, 1914, p. 5).

The show had just appeared on Broadway, where it was on the Victoria roof from July 1, in tabloid form, running forty-five minutes (NY Age, May 7, 1914, n.p. [6])

1914, in August: Jesse A. Shipp, Alex Rogers, James Reese Europe, Henry Troy, R. C. McPherson, Lester A. Walton and other interested parties are proposing to mount a big production that will run first at the Lafayette and then, if successful, transfer to Broadway; this is, in fact, a group of individuals associated with the Lafayette and with The Negro Players and The Old Man's Son of last season; it is hoped that the proposed new production will reach the stage "before many months"; it will be a production "which will remind [folks] of the days of Williams & Walker"; those directly concerned with the project must take the chance to promote it; (NY Age, August 27, 1914, n.p. [6]).

Although Will Marion Cook is not named here, this sounds like what will become Darkeydom II.

## **The Lafayette, 1914-1915**

Mostly vaudeville and photoplay at the Lafayette this season, with visits from three big touring productions---the colored road shows of Whitney & Tutt, Leubrie Hill, and Black Patti (NY Age, August 27, 1914, n.p. [6]). This is the first full year under the management of Walton and Morgenstern, who had been in charge from May 1914. Presumably many or most of the vaudeville bills this year had tabs, but not all.

1914, in September: kicking off the fall, Black Patti brings her big show Lucky Sam From Alabam' to the Lafayette from September 21 for one week only; the show has Harrison Stewart as co-star; Stewart put it together, including writing songs, from some of his vaudeville bits; it is a big-show three-act musical; this is her return to the stage after a year off; it is her first Harlem appearance in a quite some time; Patti and company did a grand concert at the theatre on Sunday, September 27 (NY Age, September 17, 1914, n.p. [6]; NY Age, September 24, 1914, n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, September 5, 1914, p. 5)

1914, in September: the regular season of vaudeville and photoplays opens Monday, September 28

1914, in December: Abbie Mitchell and Will Marion Cook are on the vaudeville bill now that she is over a severe cold, beginning Monday, December 7, and there is also a thirty-minute musical farce, Miss Lucy's Birthday Party (NY Age, December 3, 1914, n.p. [6])

1915, in January: Larkins & Pearl, etc., in vaudeville (NY Age, Thursday, January 14, 1915, p. [6])

1915, in February: Leubrie Hill brings his Darktown Follies company's production of My Friend From Kentucky to the theater for the weeks of February 1 and 8, and offers Blackville Corporation for a week from Monday, February 15 (NY Age, February 4, 1915, etc.)

1915, in April: Whitney & Tutt bring the Smart Set's His Excellency, the President, to the Lafayette for a week beginning April 26 (NY Age, April 22, 1915; NY Age, April 29, 1915).

1915, in May: Whitney & Tutt return to the Lafayette with His Excellency, the President beginning May 17 (NY Age, May 13, 1915; NY Age, May 20, 1915).

1915, in May: the week of May 24 is Anniversary Week and Morgenstern and Walton celebrated their first anniversary at the Lafayette by presenting a monster vaudeville bill

### **The Lafayette, 1915-1916**

1915, in September: from September 20, Whitney and Tutt's Smart Set Company brings the big three-act George Washington Bullion Abroad to the Lafayette for one week only, as the season's kick-off (NY Age, Thursday, September 23, n.p. [6])

1915, in September: the regular season of vaudeville and photoplays opens Monday, September 27, with occasional big shows rolling through

1915, in October: from October 11, a return engagement of Whitney and Tutt's George Washington Bullion Abroad at the Lafayette for one week

1915, in October: from October 18, Black Patti (Sissieretta Jones) heads a vaudeville bill at Lafayette; she appeared in the first half of the week and was held over to the second half of the week (NY Age, Thursday, October 21, 1915, p. 6)

1915, in October: **DARKYDOM**; on October 25, called the biggest thing in years, the new big show composed by Cook, Darkydom, plays the Lafayette for two weeks; initially for one week, and then it is held over into the week of November 1 (NY Age, Thursday, October 21, 1915, p. 6)

1915, in November: Billy King in Old Kentucky Home for just three performances, with some controversy (Indianapolis Freeman, November 20, 1915, p. 5)

### **1916, early: The Lafayette Players**

A troupe of this name in their second and most famous iteration. It was a troupe assembled mainly for serious, spoken drama, not musical comedies. In respect to personnel, the troupe derives from the earlier Anita Bush Stock Company that had just started being active at Harlem's Lincoln Theater, i.e., the New Lincoln Theatre on 135th St. near Lenox, in late 1915 ("Anita Bush: The Originator of the Negro "Drama" Stock Company," Indianapolis Freeman, May 20, 1916, p. 4).

Bush's troupe did The Girl at the Fort at Harlem's New Lincoln Theatre from November 15, 1915, with five in the ensemble: Anita Bush, Charles Gilpin, "Dooley" Wilson, Carlotta Freeman, and Andrew Bishop.

After only about a month, Bush's company relocated to the Lafayette in December 1915, commencing December 27, and worked there under Lester Walton's management for just about a month, through mid to late January; their playlets were each done as part of a vaudeville bill. (NY Age, December 23, 1915, p. n.p. [6]; NY Age, December 30, 1915, p. n.p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, January 22, 1916, p. 6; Indianapolis Freeman, February 5, 1916, p. 6);

Bush bowed out with the shift in management described below, going to the Grand in Chicago (she was "called to the Grand") to set up a new, separate stock company there in March, premiering in early April; their first performance ran from April 10 at the Grand (see Sylvester Russell and Jack Trotter columns in the Indianapolis Freeman, April 15, 1916, p. 5). Bush would later return to the fold of the Lafayette Players and remain on and off until 1920. (NB: Thompson thesis, p. 44, misleadingly describes the 1915 Chicago company as "another company of The Lafayette Players").

The **Anita Bush Stock Company** at the Lafayette:

December 27: Over the Footlights, a playlet, their premiere at the Lafayette, from December 27 (NY Age, Thursday, December 30, 1915, n.p. [6]), with Bush, Freeman, Bishop, Gilpin, Wilson.

January 3: The Gambler's Sweetheart, a Western based on Belasco's Girl of the Golden West.

January 10: The Octoroon, in four acts, by Dion Boucicault, condensed by Louis Hallet to run just a little over an hour; the troupe adds two more members to the original five, J. Francis Mores and Mrs. Charles H. Anderson.

January 17: New York After Dark, a sketch, playing on a bill with vaudeville and movies, with the troupe of seven (NY Age, January 20, 1916, n.p. [6]).

January 24: Wanted---A Family, a sketch, playing on a bill with vaudeville and movies (NY Age, January 27, 1916, n.p. [6]).

January 31: When the Wife's Away, a sketch, playing on a bill with vaudeville and movies, with a cast now including Eddie Abrams and Dennie George (NY Age, January 27, 1916, n.p. [6]; NY Age, February 3, 1916, n.p. [6]).

### **The Lafayette Stock Company:**

The (new) Lafayette Players Co. or Lafayette Stock Company (very common) began with a name change (from the Anita Bush Stock Company) in March 1916, at the same time as the change of house management from Walton and Morgenstern to Robert S. Levy (as below). At the Lafayette, they were the Lafayette Stock Company a.k.a. the Lafayette Players a.k.a. the Broadway Players (because they did tab revivals of Broadway hits?), a.k.a. The Quality Players of the Quality Amusement Corporation (this last especially in out-of-town advertisements, when they were at the Howard in DC, for example).

In their first few years at the Lafayette, they did one condensed play per week. Usually these plays were condensed versions of popular

Broadway fare. They were always condensed (tabs) because the Lafayette fundamentally remained a movie/vaudeville house.

According to a reminiscence by H. Lawrence Freeman, they used Broadway plays of current success, opening every Monday afternoon with a daily matinee, and with rehearsals for the next week beginning Tuesday morning (Baltimore Afro American, June 20, 1936, p. 10)

A target date of dissolution is tricky. The company ran some seven years, to 1923 or so. The first season of NYC's **The National Negro Ethiopian Art Theatre School, Inc.** (National Ethiopian Art Theater) at the Lafayette is 1923-1924. The year 1924 may be some kind of watershed; that date is often given for the moment when the company split into four troupes. Also 1919 for this. Peterson, African American Theater Directory, says they had almost entirely ceased operations at the Lafayette by 1923, and it is in 1923 that Lester Walton leaves the management again, having been there for a second go-round in 1919-1923. Not much is going on in 1922-1923 with the Players.

NB: Sister Mary Francesca Thompson, "The Lafayette Players: 1915-1932" (PhD, University of Michigan, 1972; done in the Speech Department); Thompson acknowledges Anita Bush (1883-1974), who gave access to her private scrapbooks, and a couple of living former members of the troupe, in her "Preface." Anita Bush had been with Williams and Walker from age sixteen (Thompson, p. 8); she is the same age as Abbie Mitchell, also very diminutive like Abbie, and a member of the W&W troupe from around the same time.

It is seductive to sit and type out the repertoire from this thesis, but I have not done that; repertoire given below is from my own research as far as I have taken it, albeit checked against Thompson. There is lots, lots more in Thompson.

1916, in February: After about two years, 1914-1916, Morgenstern and Walton retire as lessees and managers of the Lafayette; Morgenstern exits in January, leaving the management all to Walton (NY Age, January 20, 1916, n.p. [6]), and Walton leaves shortly thereafter (Indianapolis Freeman, January 29, 1916, p. 6; NY Age, February 10, 1916; Indianapolis Freeman, March 18, 1916, p. 1); the Elite Amusement Corporation under Eugene

Elmore takes charge of the Lafayette, and later the other theaters. Elmore had already had his hand in, helping Walton. This corporation manages the theaters, and the Quality Amusement Corporation, managed by Robert Levy, presents the colored dramatic stock company. A year later, the week of February 19, 1917 is called the anniversary week of the Quality Amusement Corporation under general manager Robert Levy, presenting On Trial (NY Age, February 22, 1917, n.p. [6]).

NB: Thompson thesis, p. 52, says that Levy did not get management rights to the Lafayette Players until July 1916, citing NY Age, July 6, 1916, n.p. [6].

After two seasons this way, the Quality Amusement Co. takes over everything, Walton returns as manager, and they build four companies touring up a circuit of eight theaters, acc. Peterson. See below.

February 7: with change of management, the theatre was dark this week

February 14: first week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916, with new, higher prices (NY Age, February 17, 1916, n.p. [6])

February 21: second week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916

February 28: third week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916, through March 4, after which the theatre will return to its policy of dramatic stock and popular vaudeville

First three shows done on vaudeville bills:

March 6: Southern Life, a.k.a. Roanoke (NY Age, Thursday, March 2, 1916, n.p. [6]; NY Age, Thursday, March 9, 1916, n.p. [6])

March 13: For His Daughter's Honor (NY Age, Thursday, March 9, 1916, n.p. [6])

March 20: The World Against Him (NY Age, March 23, 1916)

March 27: Within the Law (NY Age, March 23, 1916)

Jack Trotter column announces the new policy that the Lafayette will change from vaudeville and pictures and produce only strong drama, the first being a production "last Monday" of Within the Law, the four-act Broadway hit, which actually plays the Lafayette in the week of March 27, and was not the first, unless there was also vaudeville alongside the first three (Indianapolis Freeman, April 1, 1916, p. 5); Indianapolis Freeman, April 22, 1916, p. 5 has list; ("Lafayette Changes From Vaudeville and Pictures. Will Produce only Strong Dramas in Future")

1916, in March: Laura Bush leaves around now for Chicago; she is performing in a new company at the Grand Theatre in Chicago in the weeks of April 10 with The Girl and the Fort (which she had done at the Lincoln theater in NYC) and April 17 with The Accomplice, on bills that also included vaudeville acts (Indianapolis Freeman, April 22, 1916, p. 5); as Anita Bush and her stock company, this troupe goes on the road in the summer, e.g., playing Cincinnati in July (Thompson thesis, p. 47)

1916, in earliest April: Othello excerpt given on Sunday, April 2 for audience including Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and his party; Edward Sterling Wright reads some lines for Tree's approval (NY Times, April 3, 1916, p. 11; NY Herald, April 3, 1916, p. 10; NY Dramatic Mirror, April 15, 1916, p. 6); the play is scheduled to run in week of April 17, acc. NY Times (next week, acc. Indianapolis Freeman, April 8, 1916, p. 5)

April 3: Paid in Full (NY Age, April 6, 1916); Gilpin leaves the cast mid week, feeling financially under-rewarded (Indianapolis Freeman, April 15, 1916, p. 5)

April 10: Under Cover (NY Age, April 6, 1916; rev. Jack Trotter in Indianapolis Freeman, April 15, 1916, p. 5)

April 17: Kick In (NY Age, April 20, 1916)

1916, in April: The Lafayette Players set up a second company in later April to go into rotation at the Lafayette and the Howard. Debuts



May 1 in NYC in The Wolf (NY Age, April 27, 1916). The original company goes to DC with two shows for late April/early May. The rotation goes a week at Lafayette (NYC), then a week at the Howard (DC).

April 24: Othello; the Lafayette hosts an outside, all-Negro company starring Edward Sterling Wright in Othello (NY Age, April 20, 1916; NY Age, April 27, 1916); this had once been expected for the week of April 10 and then for the week of April 17; this special company is directed by R. Voeckel; the regular stock company is in Washington, DC, doing Under Cover this week (Washington Bee, April 29, 1916, p. 4) and Kick In in the week of May 1 (Washington Evening Star, May 3, 1916, p. 5).  
Meantime, the second company is in rehearsal.

May 1: The Wolf done by the second company (begins May 1, acc. NY Age, April 27, 1916; also, "next week" in Indianapolis Freeman, May 6, 1916, p. 5; Chicago Defender, May 13, 1916, p. 4 speaks of "last week"; Freeman, June 10, 1916, p. 7);  
the first company is doing Kick In at the Howard this week;  
The Wolf then goes to the Howard in the week of May 8 (Washington Bee, May 6, 1916, p. 5), and so forth in the rotation

May 8: Bought and Paid For (Chicago Defender, May 13, 1916, p. 4; Freeman, June 10, 1916, p. 7)

May 15: The Deep Purple

May 22: Tennessee's Partner (Chicago Defender, May 27, 1916, p. 6)

May 29: Fine Feathers

June 5: The Man on the Box

June 12: The Master Mind

June 19: To-Day

June 26: Alias Jimmy Valentine

1916, in July: late in the month a third theater, the Colonial (Baltimore) was added to the rotation (see Indianapolis Freeman, July 22, 1916, p. 6, where the possibility of Philadelphia and Baltimore also being added to the circuit is discussed); a theater has been secured (NY Age, Thursday, July 27, 1916, p. n.p. [6]), and it opens with The Price on July 31, though there are local racist hassles; after a few months, the Colonial does not work out, however, and it runs separate repertoire from October 30 (NY Age, November 2, 1916). One of the three Quality Amusement Corporation companies is then disbanded in December (Indianapolis Freeman, December 9, 1916, p. 4). Due to lack of patronage, the Colonial actually had to close by the end of the year (NY Age, January 4, 1917, n.p. [6])

July 3: The Escape

July 10: The Price (house opened in Baltimore on July 31 with this show)

July 17: In the Bishop's Carriage (NY Age, July 13, 1916; Jack Trotter, in Indianapolis Freeman, July 29, 1915, p. 4, says "last week")

July 24: The Third Degree (in Baltimore from August 7)

July 31: The Ghost Breaker

August 7: A Pair of Sixes

August 14: Big Jim Garrity (NB: with Anita Bush among others)

August 21: Sign of the Four

August 28: Stop Thief

The company is doing a regular itinerary of playing the Lafayette, the Howard in DC, and the Colonial in Baltimore (NY Age, August 10, 1916, n.p. [6])

## The Lafayette, 1916-1917

September 4: At Bay

September 11: Within the Law (return)

September 18: Madame X

September 25: Whitney & Tutt bring How Newtown Prepared for the week

October 2: The Family Cupboard; this marks a return to presenting dramas (NY Age, September 28; NY Age, October 5)

October 9: The Conspiracy

October 16: The Lure

October 23: The Man of the Hour

October 30: The stock company mostly did straight plays, but they sometimes did a musical; for example, they did the George M. Cohan musical 45 Minutes From Broadway this week; from this Monday, the Baltimore theater is out of the rotation

November 6: 45 Minutes From Broadway held over, with some changes of song numbers

November 13: The City

November 20: The Lion and the Mouse; on the same date Raffles premieres in Washington at the Howard

November 27: Raffles in NYC

1916, in early December: one of the three theatrical companies, the one at the Howard at the time from November 20, starring the major headliners Andrew Bishop, Will A. Cooke, Lawrence Chenault, Luke Scott, James H. Gray, Arthur Wilkes, Anita Bush, Charlotta

Freeman, Ruth Carr, Inez Clough, and Marie Young, was disbanded, being given two weeks notice; they returned to NYC and did their last run at the Lafayette in Raffles from November 27, closing December 2; among the members of the troupe, Andrew Bishop, for example, immediately joined another of the Quality Amusement Corporation ensembles, while Anita Bush immediately organized a company of her own to play at Gibson's Standard Theatre in Philadelphia (Indianapolis Freeman, December 9, 1916, p. 4); CHECK: Thompson thesis, p. 65, cites NY Age for disbanding and reorganizing (NY Age, December 21, 1916, n.p. [6])

The two-theater rotation continues, with some bumps, to end of the 1916-1917 season. Etc. Etc.

1917, in June: at the Lafayette, Whitney & Tutt bring back How Newtown Prepared for the week beginning June 18, 1917 (NY Times, June 17, 1917, p. X2)

### **The Lafayette, 1917-1918**

The two-theater rotation continues in the 1917-1918 season. Etc. Etc.

1918, in April: First reference in Chicago Defender to the Lafayette Players coming to Chicago, after a successful run of over two years in New York; Abbie Mitchell and etc. are in Madame X (Chicago Defender, April 13, 1918, p. 6)

1918, in April: at Lafayette, Faust

1918, in April: at Lafayette, His Honor The Mayor is revived in the week of April 29, 1918.

### **The Lafayette, 1918-1919**

Two- or three-theater rotation continues in 1918-1919 season. Chicago-based company returns in November to NYC after six months. Etc. Etc.

### **The Lafayette, 1919-1920**

1919, in July: change of management on July 1; the Quality Amusement Company is now owned and controlled by Negroes, and Lester Walton is back, taking full charge from Robert Levy on August 1; a new syndicate is in the works, and an acting school; Philadelphian E. C. Brown building new Dunbar Theater there, and creating the syndicate (Thompson thesis, pp. 128 ff.; NY Age, July 12, p. 1; New York Clipper, October 1, 1919, p. 4; New York Clipper, November 22, 1919, p. 5); attendance, and power of Players material to draw black audiences, are at issue

the Lafayette Players begin with a strong company including familiar names Abbie Mitchell, Mattie Wilkes, Will A. Cooke, Lawrence Chenault, J. Francis Mores, and so forth; their new season from September 1 (NY Age, September 6, 1919, p. 6).

Famous current plays, but also vaudeville and motion pictures.

NB: Articles in NY Age do not say that the shows are abbreviated.

NB: There is not a major show every week, I think, at least not by 1920.

NB: in 1920, after a run of musical shows the Lafayette is bringing in a vaudeville show, and members of the Lafayette Players will be seen in a strong dramatic sketch; the bill has 8 big vaudeville acts including the Players and also a first run movie feature (NY Age, July 31, 1920, p. 6)

1919, in August: for two weeks from Monday, August 4 and August 11, Billy King company brings a big show, a revue entitled "They're Off" (NY Age, Saturday, August 9, 1919, p. 6)

1919, in October: the Lafayette Players perform at the Putnam Theatre in Brooklyn for a week beginning October 13 (NY Age, October 4, 1919, p. 6)

1919, in December: Philadelphia's Dunbar Theater opened December 29, 1919

1920, in March: Abbie Mitchell leaves the Players to join ex-husband Cook on stage in Europe

1920, in March: Laura Bush leaves the Players

1920, in April: at the Lafayette beginning April 26, a sharp shift away from legitimate drama to "Big Time Vaudeville and High Class Pictures" (NY Age, April 24)

-----

### **A School of Dramatic and Musical Arts in the 1920s**

In brief, upon his return from four years in Europe, Will Marion Cook found black theatre to be at an ebb (e.g., the slow dissolution of the Lafayette Players), and he supported efforts to revitalize and institutionalize it. Over the middle years of the 1920s, Cook produced benefit concerts for a **Negro Folk Music and Drama Society or Negro Folk Theatre Association** (1923-1924 season, in January 1924), a **Negro Art School or Negro School of Music** (1925-1926 season, in January 1926), and a **Negro School of Dramatic and Musical Art** (1926-1927 season, in December 1926). He is identified as the director or head of the latter organization.

-----

### **Cook and a National Negro Theatre in the 1930s**

Cook's abortive fall 1932 and fall 1934 large-scale musical theater projects (see above for St. Louis Woman and Dusk and Dawn) need to be seen in the context of the financial exigencies of the Depression years, and the proliferation and politicization (and rise and fall) of Negro theatre organizations in this decade.

His two big unrealized productions may have been the most ambitious and mainstream African-American theatre projects of those years. Still, they fell

outside the framework of an organization that might have provided institutional and financial support.

1932, in the fall: Cook's St. Louis Woman, which does not open.

1932-1933: An enterprise called **Repertory Playhouse Associates, Inc.**, just getting underway in fall 1932, is starting a school and planning a permanent Negro repertoire company to do professional productions starting in the 1933-1934 season; it "aims to establish a Negro folk theatre, to encourage and develop the authentic Negro contribution in the allied theatre arts of acting, music and the dance"; under Herbert V. Gellendre as general director, while involved parties include Rose McClendon and Alain Locke, etc.  
(Brooklyn Eagle, June 8, 1932, p. 20; NY Age, November 12, 1932, p. 6; NY Age, March 18, 1933, p. 6, etc.);  
this organization under Gellendre seems to keep going into 1936

1933, in the spring: The **Negro Theatre Guild**, a new organization, did Louisiana, written by Gus Smith, at the 48th St. Theatre at the end of February 1933 as its first (and last) offering; in the cast are the author, Laura Bowman, Lionel Monagas, etc. Gus (J. Augustus) Smith (1891-1950), actor/ director/ playwright/, was one of the folks named as pitching in to help Will Marion Cook with Dusk and Dawn at the beginning of the decade.  
No hits on this new NYC organization in "Historical Newspapers" for 1933, so it evidently disappears at once.  
(NY Evening Post, February 27, 1933, p. 15; NY Evening Post, February 28, 1933, p. 17; Seattle Daily Times, March 4, 1933, p. 2; Omaha World Herald, March 12, 1933, p. 14).

1934, from June into the fall: **National Negro Theatre** idea (or **National Theatre for Black Actors**) originated by J. Homer Tutt and two others, launched with a musicale on Thursday evening, June 7, 1934 at St. James Presbyterian Church, a midnite benefit at the Lafayette on June 26, 1934 and a Town Hall Concert in October 1934. The process in the second half of 1934 is heavily politicized and columns in the Age are against Tutt (or at least his partner Peter Murrell/Morrell/Morell); especially the "In the Name of Art" column by Vere E. Johns, which is implacably

hostile to Morrell and hard on Tutt. The Tutt project is basically shipwrecked by September, and three ladies step in (Laura Bowman, Gertrude Fayde, and Helen Mair).

(Chicago Defender, June 16, 1934, p. 8; NY Times, June 23, 1934, p. 11; NY Age, June 16, 1934, p. 4; NY Age, July 7, 1934, p. 4; NY Age, July 14, 1934, p. 4; Chicago Defender, August 18, 1934, p. 9; NY Age, September 22, 1934, p. 4; NY Times, September 30, 1934, p. X6; NY Times, October 4, 1934, p. 18; NY Times, October 7, 1934, p. 35; NY Age, October 20, 1934, p. 4)

1934, in August: the giant Pageant at Chicago's Century of Progress exposition, with Cook's leadership and participation (see above).

1934, in the fall: Cook's Dusk and Dawn, which does not open.

1935: Tutt's **National Negro Theatre**, originating the year before, but without a good manager and sinking into debt, seems not to have lasted very long at all, and becomes the **National Negro Art School** (a theatrical enterprise) under Laura Bowman; after fund-raising and discussion in 1934, its charter is announced on Friday, January 18, 1935, and it is going to be in business by the summer of 1935. NY Age, January 19, 1935, p. 4; NY Age, January 26, 1935, p. 4; NY Age, February 23, 1935, p. 4; Pittsburgh Courier, June 8, 1935, n.p.; Chicago Defender, June 8, 1935, p. 1)

NB: Laura Bowman (Mrs. Sydney Kirkpatrick) (1881-1957) has a stage career that begins in the chorus of In Dahomey (1902); joined Lafayette Players in 1916; involved with Will Marion Cook in his Too Bad project of fall 1925; active until felled by stroke around 1950.

1935, in April: Noble Sissle has been holding meetings to try "to get his pet idea, the **Negro Actors' Guild**, under way" (Billboard, April 6, 1935, p. 6); it eventually was formed in December 26, 1937 (see below).

1935, in December: Will Marion Cook has agreed to be a member of an advisory board for the **National Negro Theatre**, a non-profit organization that is going into play production after two years of preparation; given the name, this is clearly a revitalization of Tutt's earlier organization of the same name; its Advisory Board includes Cook, Melville Charlton, J. R. Johnson, etc.; Working board includes J.



Homer Tutt, Gus Smith, Peter Morrell, etc.; Musical Department includes Joe Jordan, Lucky Roberts, Russell Wooding, etc.

This is not quite the same outfit as the Bowman group just above, from January of this year, but it is essentially its successor, the next iteration, and has the same name as the Tutt enterprise of 1934; Tutt has a major hand in this new initiative; Gus Smith is one of the directors; the three plays to be mounted at the Venice Theatre are Turpentine by Gus Smith and Peter Morell, Harlem Town, a musical with book and lyrics by Gus Smith and Peter Morell, and Sharecropper by Gus Smith and Peter Morell; this group never really got off the ground, on account of "financial snags"; just as in 1934, its first production, often delayed, was to be of Turpentine, which eventually was mounted by the colored unit of the Federal Theatre Project under WPA auspices in 1936.

(NY Post, July 12, 1935, p. 11; NY Post, October 29, 1935, p. 7; NY Times, October 30, 1935, p. 17; NY Times, November 13, 1935, p. 24; NY Age, December 7, 1935, p. 4; Chicago Defender, December 7, 1935, p. 8; NY Times, December 2, 1935, p. 18; NY Times, December 19, 1935, p. 32)

Side-bar: in the same year of Depression, ferment, and unemployment among actors, Rose McClendon (1884-1936) co-founded the **Negro People's Theatre** in 1935 with Dick Campbell, and it had its first production in July 1935.

This organization inspired the colored unit of the **Federal Theatre Project** (Pittsburgh Courier, July 25, 1936, 2nd Section, p. 7). The nationwide Federal project itself, under the WPA, was established in August 1935. The Federal theater project in NYC, headed by Elmer Rice, had five units; one of these was the Negro theatre project, the only NYC black unit. It had its home at the Lafayette. John Houseman was one of the original white executives of the Negro unit; he and Rose McClendon jointly headed it, according to his memoirs; the project began in October 1935, taking over the run-down Lafayette theater. He held the reins after McClendon died. (McClendon died of cancer in July 1936 during the run of Langston Hughes's Mulatto.) It was the largest of the NYC theatrical units, and the largest WPA project in Harlem (doing Haitian "Voodoo Macbeth" under Orson Welles,

etc.). Houseman and Welles officially leave the Negro unit on August 14, 1936 and three African American take over. They are Harry Edward, Gus Smith, and Carlton Moss. On June 26, 1936, the Negro Unit of the Federal Theater Project presented Turpentine by J. A. (Augustus "Gus") Smith and Peter Morell at the Lafayette. (NB NY Age, April 24, 1937, p. 9 and NY Age, January 8, 1938, p. 9 for Gus Smith's work with the WPA.)

The Negro Project was folded into the Federal Theatre Project in 1938, and the federal project itself closed in 1939.

1937, in the fall: Using the same name as Gus Smith's short-lived company of 1933, Donald Heywood co-founds the **Negro Theatre Guild** or **National Negro Theatre Guild** in Chicago in the fall of 1937 (Topeka Capitol Plaindealer, August 27, 1937, p. 6; Chicago Defender, November 13, 1937, p. 19); it has offices in NYC in the RKO Building; its first production is a play by Heywood named How Come, Lord? (NY Age, August 28, 1937, p. 9; NY Age, September 4, 1937, p. 9), which closes after only two performances (Pittsburgh Courier, October 9, 1937, p. 1)

1937, in December: the **Negro Actors Guild** is formed officially on December 26, 1937, and within a year has gained 560 members (Pittsburgh Courier, December 3, 1938, p. 20; "What the Negro Actors Guild Is Doing," NY Age, July 29, 1939, p. 7; Hill and Hatch, p. 315); it lasted until 1982; Noble Sissle was the driving force behind this new organization, and many of its officers were individuals whose careers had crossed paths with Cook; ex-wife Abbie Mitchell is a major figure in the organization for the next decade and more.

1938, in September: in Cook's last tie to live theatre, he is reported to be producing a new musical for New York, says Billy Jones in his NYC column, and "it is said that the show will be of a different type from any that has been offered on Broadway" (Chicago Defender, September 17, 1938, p. 18); a month later, Billy Jones reports it as a new play (Chicago Defender, October 22, 1938, p. 19); a week later in the Billy Jones column, Cook is said to be working hard on a script, and also on the music, for a musical show (Chicago Defender, October 29, 1938, p. 19)

No name is ever offered up for this show, and there is no further trace of it.