

A LEGACY OF HOPE IN THE CONCERT SPIRITUALS OF
ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT (1882-1943) AND WILLIAM LEVI DAWSON (1899-1990)

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Jeffrey Carroll Stone, II

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

Major Department
Music

April 2017

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

A LEGACY OF HOPE IN THE CONCERT SPIRITUALS OF
ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT (1882-1943) AND WILLIAM LEVI
DAWSON (1899-1990)

By

Jeffrey Carroll Stone, II

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota
State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Michael Weber

Chair

Dr. JoAnn Miller

Dr. Cassie Keogh

Dr. Ashley Baggett

Approved:

April 12, 2017

Date

Dr. JoAnn Miller

Department Chair

ABSTRACT

When the careers of the composers Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) and William Levi Dawson (1899-1990) began, the United States was a racially-divided society. Despite this division, both composers held a firm belief in the potential of spirituals to bring people together. Racial segregation severely limited the civil rights of people of color; however, Dett and Dawson were fueled by the hope for spirituals to bridge the racial divide in America. Both composers desired to achieve racial equality through their music. I argue that these aspirations are embodied within their concert spirituals.

This disquisition examines the legacies of Dett and Dawson for the role of “hope” in their concert spirituals. The phrase “legacy of hope” frames a distinct perspective of Dett’s and Dawson’s aspirations for the function of spirituals in American music. I examined their choral music and provided evidence of their hope for concert spirituals. In addition, I draw on scholarly books, essays, interviews, and dissertations to consider Dett’s and Dawson’s legacy of hope within the context of their social environment.

Historically, spirituals share an intimate bond to the social environment of the United States. The capacity of spirituals to provide hope appears frequently in the United States during periods of social change. To further strengthen my arguments for Dett’s and Dawson’s legacy of hope, my study relates the concept of hope to the performance of spirituals. The study is limited to the start of the concert tradition of spiritual in the late nineteenth century. Hope proves to be an inherent trait of spirituals throughout its history.

As choral conductors, we can also contribute to the legacy of hope when we further our understanding of the value and meaning of spirituals. The more ways the conductor can foster and integrate a respect for spirituals into rehearsals and performances, the greater is the

conductor's contribution to the legacy of hope. Spirituals provide the choral conductor an avenue to explore meaningful social objectives for choral ensembles. The legacy of hope was significant for the generation of Dett and Dawson and it is still relevant for ours today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this undertaking could not have been possible without the guidance, motivation, and participation of so many individuals. I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their contributions:

My wife: I am indebted to you for your endless love and support on this journey. You make me a better person.

My family: I am thankful for two parents that provided my greatest example for the potential of two races coming together. Everything I am is owed to you. I would also like to acknowledge my brother, sister-in-law, and nieces. Their video calls were always a welcomed distraction.

My professors: I have been blessed with the wisdom and kindness of outstanding professors at NDSU. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Michael Weber, for his valuable guidance and encouragement. You are a true inspiration to me in my career. I also extend the same sentiment for Dr. Jo Ann Miller for her constant encouragement and support. I am also grateful to Dr. Charlette Moe for the opportunities she provided to expand my educational experiences. I do not wish to forget Dr. Annett Richter for her invaluable assistance in every aspect of this study. Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my additional committee members, Dr. Cassie Keogh and Dr. Ashley Baggett, for their insight and feedback that contributed to the completion of this study.

Finally, I wish to thank the students at NDSU that volunteered their afternoons to participate in the presentation of this study for my lecture-recital. These students believed in the message of “hope” and have motivated me to continue further research into this area.

DEDICATION

For those that step out of their comfort zones
to see the world through the eyes of others

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. THE ROOTS: MINSTREL TROUPES AND JUBILEE CHOIRS.....	5
CHAPTER 3. THE ROOTS: JUBILEE SONGS AND MINSTREL SONGS.....	12
CHAPTER 4. THE ROOTS AND THE LEGACY OF HOPE.....	24
CHAPTER 5. THE FORGE: DETT, DAWSON, AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM.....	29
CHAPTER 6. THE FORGE: HARLEM RENAISSANCE.....	36
CHAPTER 7. THE FORGE AND THE LEGACY OF HOPE.....	52
CHAPTER 8. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE LIVES OF DETT AND DAWSON.....	55
CHAPTER 9. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE CHORAL MUSIC OF ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT.....	77
CHAPTER 10. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE CHORAL MUSIC OF WILLIAM LEVI DAWSON.....	95
CHAPTER 11. CONCLUSION.....	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	117

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Comparison of <i>Oh, Dem Golden Slippers</i> (1879) and <i>Golden Slippers</i> (1880)	16
2. Text of <i>De Floating Scow of Ol' Virginia</i> (1847).....	20
3. Text of <i>Carry Me Back, to Old Virginny</i> (1878)	21
4. Summary of Rhythm in Spirituals	45
5. Summary of Melody in Spirituals.....	48
6. Summary of Harmony in Spirituals	51
7. Development of Spiritual According to Studies from the Harlem Renaissance.....	53
8. <i>O, Holy Lord</i> (1916) Sections and Pervading Features	81

LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES

<u>Example</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. <i>Go Down, Moses</i> (1872).....	17
2. <i>Carry Me Back to Old Virginy</i> (1878).....	19
3. <i>O, Holy Lord</i> (1916), Tonality of the two themes, mm. 21- 24.	83
4. <i>O, Holy Lord</i> (1916), Last nine measures and final section, mm. 65-73.....	85
5. <i>Listen to the Lambs</i> (1914), Chromatic movement and repetition, mm. 62-74.....	87
6. <i>Don't Be Weary Traveler</i> (1921), Imitative entrances, mm. 110-17.....	89
7. <i>Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler</i> (1924), Contrapuntal textures, mm. 9-14	90
8. <i>Swing Low, Sweet Chariot</i> (1946), mm. 29-31.....	100
9. <i>Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit</i> (1946), Harmonic variance, mm. 16-20.....	102
10. <i>Soon-Ah Will Be Done</i> (1934), Syncopated Patterns, mm. 37-40.	103
11. <i>There is a Balm in Gilead</i> (1939), Articulations, m. 33.	106

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The impressive careers of Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) and William Levi Dawson (1899-1990) began inauspiciously and without fanfare. As with other African American composers born in their generation, Dett's and Dawson's career and life began in a racially-divided America—white and black. History has shown how racial segregation severely limited the civil rights of these composer. However, a sense of optimism is reflected in the careers of Dett and Dawson through every trial and struggle. Both were perfectionists in their craft and ambitious in their goals. More importantly, Dett and Dawson were fueled by the hope and desire for spirituals to bridge the racial divide in America. These aspirations are embodied within their choral music and present throughout their concert spirituals.

The term “concert spiritual” refers to the body of choral music inspired by the African American spiritual—American folk songs.¹ The term “American folk songs” refers to the music created by slaves and developed in the conditions of their enslavement. Out of my respect for these folk songs, I apply the modifier “concert” to indicate the public performance tradition that could not exist within the origins of this music. The concert tradition of spirituals represents a major point of departure from the functions of the original folk songs. The twentieth century witnessed an increased presence of spirituals as a result of this development.

In the early twentieth century, Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson are among composers that developed American folk songs through a synthesis of multiple musical traditions (e.g.,

¹ A broad view of the development of spirituals acknowledges other terms synonymous to this same group of music. In this study, these terms are clarified within the context of each chapter where they appear.

African, American, European). Their works promoted the spiritual as a serious art form and contributed to its development as concert music. Both Dett and Dawson were active in elevating the status of the spiritual from its folk songs roots. We can measure their success today through the increased presence of spirituals within our current choral repertoire.

It is difficult to imagine our current choral repertoire without the presence of concert spirituals. Because of our greater familiarity to spirituals here in the United States, we do not often reflect on the individuals responsible for this presence. However, their stories are important because it chronicles the spirituals' journey within our choral repertoire. This journey is important because it relates useful messages about life—our own, and that of others.

Conceptual Framework of this Study

This study examines the choral music of Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson to draw conclusions on messages left through their legacies. Both legacies contributed to the preservation of spirituals for future generations. For our generation, this investigation interprets evidence that symbolizes “hope” from their careers and choral music. In this disquisition, I have created the phrase “legacy of hope” to frame a distinct perspective of Dett’s and Dawson’s aspirations for the function of spirituals in Western music. This perspective considers their music and aspirations with respect to social change in American society.

Exploration of social change in the United States provides a specific setting to interpret the concert spirituals by Dett and Dawson. By recreating specific aspects of this setting we extend our understanding of Dett and Dawson according to their time and place in history. By understanding this setting, we may begin to interpret how their works symbolize a legacy of hope—a belief that the future will be better than the past.

Hope proves to be an inherent trait to spirituals throughout its history. The spiritual's capacity to provide "hope" appears frequently in the United States during periods of social change. We witness this capacity at the spiritual's creation in slavery, during the increased focus on a black cultural identity (e.g., Harlem Renaissance), within the American civil rights movement, and in more recent social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter). In these periods of social change, the spiritual's role provides hope and healing.

Hope, spirituals, and social change share a deeply connected bond. W. E. B. DuBois, famed scholar and early advocate for civil rights, published the first scientific study of this bond in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).² In this study, DuBois relates hope and spirituals in the context of social change. DuBois supports that this connection originated in slavery—a period of great "sorrow." DuBois refers to spirituals as "Sorrow Songs" when he references hope and social change in the following passage:

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes faith in death, sometimes assurances of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?³

This passage interprets spirituals as offering more to society than simply words set to music. Spirituals offer us a deeper view into the humanity or "souls" of its creators. This disquisition seeks to broaden our interpretation of spirituals through exploring this concept. When this concept is fully explored, it relates aspects of humanity that are universal to us all—regardless of race.

² DuBois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903:repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

³ *Ibid.*, 162.

Presentation of this Study

This study traces influences to the legacy of hope of Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson. The study presents these influences in three parts: 1) The Roots, 2) The Forge, and 3) The Legacy of Hope.⁴ The effort of this study does not include a complete analytical discussion of the music involved, but suggests specific influences to relate the origin and development of the legacy of hope within Dett's and Dawson's concert spirituals.

⁴ This organization is inspired by a similar structure found in the book by John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972).

CHAPTER 2. THE ROOTS: MINSTREL TROUPES AND JUBILEE CHOIRS

During the late nineteenth century, African American musicians formed jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes throughout the United States. The maturation of these performing ensembles is significant to the development of spirituals. Both jubilee choirs and (African American) minstrel troupes existed simultaneously but separately. Jubilee choirs, and their developments, are credited with creating a concert tradition for spirituals. Their performances provided a new function for spirituals in the form of musical entertainment. While a religious or ceremonial function still existed, these “concert spirituals” were instrumental in countering late nineteenth-century perceptions of African American culture.

Prior to this introduction in musical entertainment, African American culture was observed through stage performances given by white minstrel troupes. These white minstrel troupes provided a specific view of African American culture through traditions established in their development of minstrelsy. The developments that took place reflect not only the complex history of minstrelsy, but also provides an important perspective for the African Americans that entered the same traditions as white minstrel troupes.

Minstrelsy began during the period of slavery as a form of entertainment for slave owners by their African slaves.⁵ This form of entertainment created by the slave incorporated slave (black) music. This “minstrel” music is from the same-shared history as spirituals as it featured music created and performed by slaves. The development of spirituals and minstrel songs (slave music) began to separate more distinctly through each decade of the nineteenth century.

⁵ Tilford Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 175.

During the 1830s, minstrel songs and entertainment transferred to white actors and represented an “invidious imitation” of black music and culture.⁶ The show featured an exaggeration of African American culture through stock characters (e.g., Mr. Tambo, Jim Crow) that became closely associated with the show. This included instruments associated with the African slave (e.g., tambourine, banjo, bones), with examples of such imitation found within the music of Stephen Foster (1826-1864) or Edwin Pearce (E. P.) Christy (1815-1862). African American music scholar John Lovell provides that “to establish that the most famous of the minstrel composers took his material directly from the Afro-American spirituals is the best way to open debate on the full relationship between spirituals and minstrel.”⁷

Minstrelsy expanded into the foremost form of entertainment in the United States in the decades prior to the Civil War. Minstrelsy developed as political satire for social and political issues of their time period. Specific social and political included in this entertainment highlighted slavery, prominent abolitionists, and satire based on Northern black intellectuals. By this time, the minstrel show was one of complete burlesque—a deliberate exaggeration of African American culture. The social perception of black culture was influenced in the minds of many Americans through these shows.⁸ The racial label “negro” became synonymous to “humorous,” and became the pervading perception of black culture. Not every American, black or white, approved of the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 460.

⁸ The practice of blackface minstrel shows also developed at the same time. This was a practice that involved non-black performers using makeup to appear black.

ridicule found in the minstrel shows.⁹ However, minstrelsy remained the most popular form of entertainment leading through the Civil War.

After the end of the Civil War, African American performers appear within this form of minstrelsy. African American minstrel troupes appear most frequently, and sporadically, on stages in the northern United States and before eventually performing in Europe. One of the most prominent African American minstrel troupes was the Georgia Minstrels. Formed in 1865, this group featured all-African American performers, and was initially managed by an African American, George B. Hicks.¹⁰ The group underwent personnel changes throughout the remainder of the century, and reorganized under several names. Tilford Brooks provides the following synopsis of this ensemble's performance career:

At the height of its success, around 1876, the Georgia Minstrels consisted of twenty-one performers, most of them trained musicians. They performed music of the concert repertoire in concert halls and attracted the cultivated musical public. Whenever it was possible to combine serious music with the stereotype of minstrelsy in their programs, it was done. In fact, this company was recognized for its contrast with the purely slapstick performances of other companies.¹¹

The efforts of minstrel groups such as the Georgia Minstrels speaks to the struggle of performing within the social perception of African Americans towards the end of the nineteenth century. The “personal attitudes of white theater owners” limited performances or influenced what type of music minstrel troupes would be allowed to perform.¹² These personal attitudes were in response

⁹ Geneva Handy Southall, “Art Music of the Blacks in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Reflections on Afro-American Music*, ed. Dominique-René de Lerma (Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1973), 177.

¹⁰ Sandra J. Graham, “The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The Beginnings of an American Tradition” (PhD diss., New York University), 1, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304707536?accountid=6766>, 100.

¹¹ Tilford Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage*, 176.

¹² *Ibid.*, 176.

to catering specific types of entertainment for their white patrons. If a black minstrel troupe went against what the audience demanded, then the theater owner would risk losing their patrons or eventually their businesses. However, this belief in a specific demand soon proved it was not so easy to decipher as certain theater owners suggested.

The introduction of the early form of concert spirituals was separate from minstrel traditions. For this reason, the rise of jubilee choirs as venue performers is an extraordinary story. Even among some African American audience members of the late nineteenth century, spirituals were an unknown entity. Some more familiar to the songs believed them to be sacred and feared them being shared so openly. This fear was a reality because of the popularity and performance practices that existed within minstrelsy. Others even argued that the “institution of slavery had been so degrading to them and their ancestors” that it would be best to ignore them all together because of their association to the slavery.¹³ Despite these objections, jubilee songs were introduced to both black and white audiences that were unaware of the existence of the material that provided this genre of music.

Jubilee choirs would emerge from educational institutions in the South that were created for the sole purpose of providing education to newly freed slaves. These schools were under constant threat of closing due to financial difficulties in funding as well as antipathy from Southern whites that actively sought to close such schools. However, these schools—and the jubilee choirs associated with them—contributed to the financial stability needed to continue.

The maturation of jubilee choirs is an important chapter to the stories and history of these educational institutions. Many of the stories are equally important to the history of the United States. Such is the case with the first and most significant of these jubilee choirs—the singers

¹³ Ibid., 181.

from what is now Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Their story is an important milestone in the development of spirituals. On October 6, 1871, George L. White (1838-1895) and nine of his music students from Fisk, eight of which were former slaves, set out on a concert tour in hopes of raising funds for their school.¹⁴

Twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have produced several studies of the events that led to this day and those that would follow. These studies affirm the importance of what would become the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their introduction of concert spirituals to the United States and the world. More entries, such as the ensembles of Hampton Singers and Fairfield Normal Institute, also set out on tours and perform spirituals as early as 1872. By the end of 1873, several more touring ensembles existed proving how receptive audiences were to spirituals, which the groups referred to as “jubilee songs.”¹⁵

The term jubilee references the Jewish year of jubilee when all slaves were set free. In addition to the term being synonymous with spirituals, “jubilee” was included in the title of several touring ensembles (e.g., Fisk Jubilee, Canaan Jubilee, etc.). With the word “jubilee,” these groups could separate themselves from minstrel music and shows.¹⁶ To change the perceptions of African American culture, these early jubilee choirs had to struggle against associations to minstrel music and ensembles. These ensembles branded themselves through their music (spirituals/jubilee songs) and visually through their portrayal on stage. These aspects brought a new perspective to African American music and culture.

¹⁴ John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, 402.

¹⁵ Graham, “The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual,” 317.

¹⁶ Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers, Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 139.

The new “brand” of African American ensembles represented a different degree of respectability for African American music and gained acceptance from both white and black audiences. Though jubilee choirs were initially seen and heard as the same as minstrel troupes, their differences quickly became apparent to audiences in the United States and in Europe (e.g., England, Scotland, Germany).¹⁷ As early as 1871, reviews in nineteenth-century newspapers and journals supports and highlights these differences.¹⁸ In summary of a selection of reviews, musicologist John Lovell states, “To sum it all up, the 1870’s were a period of musical revolution in a large segment of the Western world. That revolution was caused by the dissemination and absorption of the Afro-American spiritual.” The “dissemination and absorption” provides the significance of this period to the development of concert spirituals

History scholars of the twentieth century debated the degree of assimilation of white culture that is present in the jubilee choirs and songs.¹⁹ At the center of their debate is whether jubilee choirs were a true reflection of black culture. James Weldon Johnson claimed that jubilee choirs “constituted both an artistic sensation and a financial success, neither of which results could have been attained had their songs been mere imitations of European folk music or

¹⁷ The Fisk Jubilee Singers began their first tour in 1871 with similar ensembles from other institutes established for the education of freedmen. These jubilee ensembles were identified in nineteenth-century advertisements as minstrels prior to the label “jubilee.”

¹⁸ For reviews on jubilee songs, see “The Jubilee Singers in Manchester,” *The Manchester Courier* (Manchester, England), Mar. 13, 1876.; “Coloured Jubilee Singers at Willis’s Rooms,” *The Daily News* (London, England) May 7, 1873.; “The Jubilee Singers,” *The World: New York* (New York), Dec. 29, 1871; for reviews on minstrel songs, see “Notes from the Concert Room,” *The Sketch* (London, England), Apr. 11, 1894.;

¹⁹ John Lovell provides an excellent discourse that includes nineteenth and twentieth century scholars and sources that contributed to this debate. Though his view is biased, the information provided became generally accepted by the beginning of the twenty-first century. See chapters six through thirteen in *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 24-126.

adaptations of European airs.”²⁰ I interpret this to mean that while there was an effort to assimilate aspects of perceived white culture—within the musical characteristics of the music and the visual portrayal of these ensembles—that these ensembles were still distinct development of African American culture. This becomes increasingly apparent through the early decades of the twentieth century.

²⁰ James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925), 1:17.

CHAPTER 3. THE ROOTS: JUBILEE SONGS AND MINSTREL SONGS

African American musicians developed jubilee songs and minstrel songs as two distinct musical genres during the late nineteenth century. Though both genres emerge from the same repertory of music (i.e., slave songs), each developed its own musical-identity through separate African American performing ensembles (i.e., jubilee choirs, minstrel troupes). These performers established a wider reputation and recognition for African American music. As the recognition for the caliber of music and performance increased, their songs left the confines of the United States and spread throughout the rest of the world.

We can observe the significance of jubilee songs and minstrel songs as an influence on music, society, and culture. The residue of their influence spawned new genres of music, inspired social movements, redefined social perceptions, and opened doors to new opportunities for African Americans. Though jubilee songs and minstrel songs were opposites in many respects, both exist as components within the cultural identity of African Americans. However, this statement encompasses a paradox: neither is authentic to African American culture despite African Americans developing both in their culture.

This chapter deconstructs this paradox to define the significance of jubilee songs and minstrel songs to the social perceptions and the cultural identity of African Americans. What began in these nineteenth-century genres would subsequently influence the twentieth-century concert spirituals of Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) and William Dawson (1899-1990). To clarify this influence, it is important to differentiate each genre's aspects that both separate *and* bind them to African American culture.

As described in chapter two, nineteenth-century audiences were already familiar to minstrel songs prior to the introduction of jubilee songs in the last thirty years of the century. The

minstrel songs made popular by white actors and musicians were well-known with audiences throughout the nineteenth-century.²¹ Their minstrel songs were advertised as authentic reflections of African American musical characteristics (e.g., melody, harmony, text) and culture.

According to the distinguished scholar and writer Alain Locke, “Even serious singing took on the trite form of the ‘barber-shop quarter’; Negro harmony was supposed to be the ‘barber-shop chord,’ and you could make any song Negro by sprinkling it with Negro dialect.”²² As African Americans developed minstrel songs, many of these aspects were maintained—specifically, the use of dialect. Jubilee songs were developed in opposition to the use of dialect. This characteristic is critical to the difference of jubilee songs to minstrel songs.

For audiences, the clearest distinction between jubilee songs and minstrel songs were the words of their songs. Specifically, the distinctions found in the 1) use of dialect, and 2) the content of the texts. The extant repertory of vocal works performed by jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes reflects this difference. The texts of jubilee songs—such as the music performed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers—were without dialect (Standard English) and typically of a spiritual content. Minstrel songs, even those composed by African Americans, incorporated dialect within several areas of content. The content of these minstrel songs was most often within the norm of minstrelsy—comedic-intent (e.g., racial stereotypes, political commentary). However, some

²¹ Thomas Dartmouth (T. D.) Rice (1808-1860) popularized blackface minstrelsy and significantly influenced the popularity of caricature in minstrel shows. His efforts led to the increase of misrepresentative music and traditions.

²² Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC, The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 54.

African American composers and minstrel troupes began to develop minstrel songs in new directions.

James Bland (1854-1911) was an African American minstrel composer that led minstrel songs toward one area of new content. His contemporaries regarded him as the most-talented minstrel composer of the late nineteenth century. Alain Locke describes the songs of Bland as “music of the heart” that contained the “more melodic and melancholy element in Negro song.”²³ Though Bland still used dialect in his minstrel songs, his music challenged the stereotypes found in the minstrelsy tradition. Examples within his works forego the social perceptions of African Americans as foolish, lazy, overly sensual, and primitive—the more prominent areas of content for minstrel songs. Several African American minstrel troupes also expressed this same desire to explore new content. The Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels, associated with Bland as composer, incorporated similar efforts in their songs and show. Their effort attempted to transcend the overtly negative social perceptions of African Americans common in minstrel traditions.

On-stage a fictional world existed, off-stage the musicians were very aware of their reality and the perceptions of African Americans. The extensive use of dialect in minstrel songs and comedic-acts often reaffirmed negative social perceptions that minstrel troupes such as Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels faced off-stage. Dialect was a central characteristic of minstrel shows but the content of minstrel songs often experienced change. The minstrel songs of Bland are an example of how African American minstrel composers could challenge negative social perceptions by offering new areas of content. One interesting development in the content

²³ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC, The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936).

of minstrel song occurs through the influence of jubilee songs. This specific area of content features parodies of jubilee songs.

This is observed in James Bland's minstrel song *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers* (1879), a minstrel parody of a similarly titled jubilee song performed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. In its collection of choral works from 1870 through 1885, the Library of Congress describes that "the Fisk song was not published until 1880; it was then described as 'one of the most popular songs' of the 'Jubilee Singers'; it had presumably been performed for some time before it was published."²⁴ Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the text of the two songs as it appears in their publications. The comparison provides a unique perspective on one specific difference in content between minstrel songs and jubilee songs.

The jubilee song, *Golden Slippers* (1880) appears in a strophic form and without the use of dialect. The content of this jubilee song is also of clear spiritual (religious) nature. The minstrel parody, *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers* (1879), also appears in strophic form but with dialect. The content of this minstrel song references religious content (e.g., white robe, golden street), but infers that the character is very materialistic and not truly religious. Bland also references "chariot" and "in de morn" (in the morning), both common themes and phrases found in jubilee songs and slave songs.

²⁴"In Performance: Choral Works from the Collection" in *Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music ca. 1870 to 1885*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/american-sheet-music-1870-to-1885/articles-and-essays/in-performance-choral-works-from-the-collection/> From the Library of Congress (accessed January 10, 2016).

Table 1. Comparison of *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers* (1879) and *Golden Slippers* (1880)

<i>Oh, Dem Golden Slippers</i> (1879)	<i>Golden Slippers</i> (1880)
<p>Oh, my golden slippers am laid away, Kase I don't 'spect to wear 'em till my weddin' day, And my long-tail'd coat, dat I loved so well, I will wear up in de chariot in de morn; And my long white robe dat I bought last June, I'm 'gwine to git changed Kase it fits too soon,</p> <p>And de ole grey hoss dat I used to drive, I will hitch him to de chariot in de morn.</p> <p>Chorus Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers! Golden slippers I'm gwine to wear, becase dey look so neat; Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers! Golden slippers Ise gwine to wear, To walk de golden street.</p>	<p>What kind of shoes you going to wear? Golden slippers!</p> <p>What kind of crown you going to wear? Star-y crown!</p> <p>What kind of robe you going to wear? White robe!</p> <p>What kind of song you going to sing? New song!</p>

In his study of the use of dialect in African American music, musicologist John Graziano observes that the absence of “African American” dialect in jubilee choirs “reflected a desire to demonstrate that African Americans were educated and could speak and sing in standard English.”²⁵ Example 1 features an arrangement of *Go Down, Moses* (1872), one of the most popular jubilee songs performed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This arrangement appears in Standard English and is characteristic of the form and texture in other arrangements by the ensemble. The content of the songs is directly related to themes found in several slave songs (e.g., Moses, Israelites, captivity, freedom).

²⁵ John Graziano, “The Use of Dialect in African-American Spirituals, Popular Songs, and Folk Songs,” *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (2004): 261, www.jstor.org/stable/4145494 (accessed November 28, 2017).

The integration of religious slave songs and melodies became very popular with the public. By the end of the 1870s, public perception began to also consider jubilee songs as more authentic representations of African American culture. Minstrel songs also increased in the number of imitations or parodies of jubilee songs. African American minstrel composers contributed to the development of these songs. New content areas and melodic material resembling more closely to jubilee songs also increased.

Andante

Solo

When Is-rael was in Eg-ypt's land: Let my peo-ple go, Op-press'd so hard they could not stand, Let my peo-ple go, Let my peo-ple go, Let my peo-ple go,

Chorus

Solo

Let my peo-ple go, Go down, Mos-es, Way down in

8

Chorus

Unison

Let my peo-ple go, Go down, Mos-es, Way down in

Let my peo-ple go, Go down, Mos-es, Way down in

Let my peo-ple go, Go down, Mos-es, Way down in

Let my peo-ple go, Go down, Mos-es, Way down in

Example 1. *Go Down, Moses* (1872).

Another area of content of minstrel music explored by African American minstrel composers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century evokes memories of the Southern past—nostalgia for the “days gone by.” This content was in response to the failure of Reconstruction legislations, economic difficulties, and industrialization. The social and economic uncertainty was felt by all Americans (black and white), and resulted in the migration of the population from rural areas to cities. The content of these minstrel songs began to represent these sentiments and became focused on remembering the past. These minstrel songs explored the notion that African Americans longed to return to the plantation and their past lives. African American composers of minstrel music encouraged this content area. However, the reasons for composing such songs did not include their support to return to a life of slavery.

James Bland is also among the composers that explored this content. It is important to note that Bland was and raised in New York to a family distantly removed from slavery. Bland never experienced that past and a review of his life supports his objection to African Americans being subjected to that reality. However, Bland’s composition *Carry Me Back, to Old Virginny* (1878) is considered one of the greatest minstrel songs of the late nineteenth century that evoke the past. Its popularity extended well into the twentieth century. It even served as a state song for the state of Virginia beginning in 1940 (ex. 2).²⁶

As mentioned, Bland was born in New York and never experienced this past he associates with Virginia in his song. Nonetheless, his song illustrates another development of content. Scholars believe that his song is an adaptation of earlier song, *De Floating Scow of Ol’ Virginia* (1847), a popular minstrel song found the traditions of blackface minstrelsy. A

²⁶ The Virginia Senate voted in 1997 to retire *Carry Me Back, to Old Virginny*. It is no longer the official state song.

comparison of the two texts (see table 2 and table 3) reveals similarities between the content of the two songs and a decrease in the presence of dialect.

The minstrel songs that are important to the development of spirituals are those that disrupted the traditions of extreme racial content and dialect. As dialect increasingly becomes a contentious issue in the debates by African American scholars, those that argue for the use of dialect point to the minstrel songs such as the works of Bland. While the content is still objectionable, the arguments begin to encompass the meaningful use of dialect. This debate reaches its height in the twentieth century during the Harlem Renaissance.

Car-ry me back to old Vir-gin-ny, There's where the cot-ton and the corn and ta-toes grow,
 Car-ry me back to old Vir-gin-ny, There's where the cot-ton and the corn and ta-toes grow,
 Car-ry me back to old Vir-gin-ny, There's where the cot-ton and the corn and ta-toes grow —
 Car-ry me back to old Vir-gin-ny, There's where the cot-ton and the corn and ta-toes grow,

There's where the birds war-ble sweet in the spring-time, There's where this old dark-ey's heart am long'd to go.
 There's where the birds war-ble sweet in the spring-time, There's where this old dark-ey's heart am long'd to go.
 There's where the birds war-ble sweet in the spring-time, There's where this old dark-ey's heart am long'd to go.
 There's where the birds war-ble sweet in the spring-time, There's where this old dark-ey's heart am long'd to go.

Example 2. *Carry Me Back to Old Virginy* (1878).

Table 2. Text of *De Floating Scow of Ol' Virginia* (1847)

Chorus
<p>Den carry me back to ole Virginny To ole Virginny shore, Oh, carry me back to ole Virginny, To ole Virginny shore.</p>
Verse (Examples)
<p>On de floating scow ob ole Virginny, I've worked from day to day, Raking among de oyster beds, To me it was but play; But now I'm old and feeble, An' my bones are getting sore, Den carry me back to ole Virginny To ole Virginny shore.</p> <p>Oh, I wish dat I was young again, Den I'd lead a different life, I'd save my money and buy a farm, And take Dinah for my wife; But now old age, he holds me tight, And I cannot love any more, Oh, carry me back to ole Virginny, To ole Virginny shore.</p> <p>When I am dead and gone to roost, Lay de old tambo by my side, Let de possum and coon to my funeral go, For dey are my only pride; Den in soft repose, I'll take my sleep, An' I'll dream for ever more, Dat you're carrying me back to ole Virginny</p>

Table 3. Text of *Carry Me Back, to Old Virginny* (1878)

Chorus
<p>Carry me back to old Virginny. There's where the cotton and corn and taters grow. There's where the birds warble sweet in the spring-time. There's where this old darkey's heart am long'd to go.</p>
Verses
<p>There's where I labored so hard for old Massa, Day after day in the field of yellow corn; No place on earth do I love more sincerely Than old Virginny, the state where I was born.</p> <p>Carry me back to old Virginny, There let me live till I wither and decay. Long by the old Dismal Swamp have I wandered, There's where this old darkey's life will pass away.</p> <p>Massa and Missis have long since gone before me, Soon we will meet on that bright and golden shore. There we'll be happy and free from all sorrow, There's where we'll meet and we'll never part no more.</p>

Harry Thacker (H. T.) Burleigh (1866-1949), a successful African American composer of the late nineteenth century, was a strong advocate for blending the positive attributes of jubilee songs and minstrel songs. Burleigh's musical career includes study at the National Conservatory of Music in New York at the same time as the arrival of Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904). Dvořák is also a familiar name to the development of spirituals as he publically sought to integrate African American music with European forms. Burleigh's career reflects similar efforts. Burleigh became well-known as a composer for his arrangements of spirituals into art song form and for his choral arrangements. His arrangements were greatly influenced by both jubilee songs

and minstrel songs. These arrangements include both jubilee songs (he referred to as spirituals) and minstrel songs.

Burleigh served as one of the strongest advocates of sacred dialect songs. Sacred dialect songs combine dialect (minstrel) with clear religious content (jubilee). However, he insisted that the use of dialect in any such arrangement should have purpose and value. In 1917, Burleigh comments on this through a discussion of performance practice for his arrangements:

It is a serious misconception of their meaning and value to treat [spirituals] as “minstrel” songs, or to try to make them funny by a too literal attempt to imitate the manner of the Negro in singing them, by swaying the body, clapping the hands, or striving to make the peculiar inflections of voice that are natural with the colored people. Their worth is weakened unless they are done impressively, for through all these songs there breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man.²⁷

The advocacy of Burleigh of African American music demonstrated a desire to make the use of dialect an acceptable practice in African American music. His reference in the last line to a similar description by W. E. B. DuBois reflects that direction. Burleigh was also among the earliest and most vocal supporters of African American music (spirituals) as an art form. This call on his life would not only change social perceptions of African Americans, but on subsequent African American composers as well. Fortunately, he was not alone in his efforts.

The legacy created by African American musicians and composers through jubilee songs and minstrel songs provided a new objective to the next generation of composers—spirituals as a classical art form. While this legacy introduced new music and developments, it ultimately came to represent the roots for composers such as Dett and Dawson. Burleigh proved it could be done but that more effort would be needed. New obstacles awaited in the twentieth century and social perceptions of African Americans became even more critical to these composers trying to

²⁷ Graziano, “The Use of Dialect.”

accomplish their new objective. A new legacy was around the corner. A legacy of hope forged from the roots of the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 4. THE ROOTS AND THE LEGACY OF HOPE

Music often reflects the moods and attitudes of society. This relationship can unfold distinctly in a society when a pivotal change occurs. The end of the American Civil War in 1865 brought such a change for the United States. American society experienced momentous social changes during this postbellum period. These social changes carried new challenges to understanding issues of race in America. This previous chapters investigated these challenges through a review of two late nineteenth-century African American performing ensembles: jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes.

These two types of ensembles were an important segment of African American cultural expressions. During the late nineteenth century, both jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes were comprised largely of former slaves alongside a few African Americans who were free-born. The performances by these ensembles were more than entertainment; each performance provided audiences a specific view of African Americans and their culture. This occurred whether positive or negative views were observed. As jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes communicated their perceived aspects of African American culture, they subsequently influenced the social perceptions of African Americans both in and outside of their own race. However, these ensembles offered two conflicting views of African American culture.

Jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes were two separate ensembles fabricated to represent two opposing views of African American culture. The presentation of these ensembles differed greatly. On one end of the spectrum is a deliberate refinement of African American culture (jubilee choirs), and on the other, one of caricature or exaggeration (minstrel troupes). Neither extreme was truly authentic; but as an entire spectrum, it shaped and molded the social perceptions of African Americans during the late nineteenth century.

It is difficult to accurately interpret how the impact of this spectrum was perceived by all the individuals that performed within these ensembles (jubilee choirs or minstrel troupes). The difficulty to interpret this information is a result of the different experiences of each ensemble. It is possible to interpret and offer the obvious challenges faced by African Americans throughout the era of enfranchisement²⁸ that ran concurrently with the postbellum period of American history. In fact, these challenges should be studied and included in any discussions of the black experience in America. How each African American ensemble navigated the social structures of the United States is both complex and important to the study of music by African Americans. The stories of these ensembles may share similarities but each is defined within their own experiences.

What can be determined, for instance, is that certain African American minstrel troupes expressed the awareness of an internal struggle between their personal experiences as African Americans and their credibility as representatives of African American culture.²⁹ This awareness existed because they personally understood that their stage characters did not truly reflect African Americans or the black experience in America. This was expressed in review of the accounts left by these ensembles, and through their developments to the “authenticity” of minstrelsy. Despite examples of positive efforts, minstrelsy continues even today as a caricature-view of African American culture.

²⁸ The era of enfranchisement refers to the ratification of the 13th (1865), 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) amendments to the constitution of the United States. In regard to 15th amendment (the right to vote), African American women were still denied this privilege until the ratification of the 19th amendment (1920) that granted all women the right to vote.

²⁹ Harry A. Johnson, *Negotiating the Mainstream* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1978), 50.

On the other end of the spectrum are jubilee choirs. These ensembles were also aware of the struggles faced in the performance of minstrel music. Jubilee choirs progressed as a counter to everything minstrelsy represented. The approach of these ensembles can be considered a direct and opposite reaction to minstrelsy. To sway the pervading perception of African Americans these ensembles felt it necessary to introduce a more European (Western) refinement to their performances. This refinement is evident in their music and through their portrayal as performers. Jubilee choirs served as ambassadors of a “civilized” African American race; they represented qualities of life that were denied to them during the period of slavery. Because it was denied, I argue that this was not authentic. I believe these ensembles represented the idea of hope for the future of their race in American society. This representation reflected less on their own experiences and focused more on what they could become in a more enlightened society. This makes their efforts significant to the ongoing struggle for racial equality. The desires of their efforts offered elements of African American culture that had previously been unknown, misunderstood, or denied by Western society. The impact of which is extremely influential to subsequent generations.

The key element to the struggles faced by either jubilee choirs or minstrel troupes is the need for positive public response. Both types of ensembles required audiences that were receptive to their music and visual portrayal of African American culture. Each faced similar challenges and each felt the social limits placed on their race. These dilemmas increased the difficulty in achieving what would be considered a positive public response for their form of entertainment.

Both jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes had to subscribe to what was considered accepted behavior, transcend limits in how they could operate, and face challenges from areas of

society that believed the African American race was devoid of culture. Undoubtedly, African Americans did possess culture even before it was nationally accepted or realized. But because many of these performers were former slaves they also shared fresh experience of how slavery suppressed or fabricated their cultural identity and cultural expressions. However, these performers explored their culture within the limits of the social structure of late nineteenth-century America. Jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes experienced two different social structures: the past (slavery) and their present (enfranchisement). Even though their privileges of freedom were not immediate or all-encompassing, these performers would have recognized these two distinctive social structures.

Both the period of slavery and the period of enfranchisement are important to the development of an African American cultural expressions such as music. The cultural expressions created by African slaves developed alongside their growing sense of a distinct culture. This distinct culture was a result of their shared experiences in America. Their shared experiences produced unique and significant cultural expressions. Music was an important cultural expression for the slaves that did not lose its significance once slavery ended. The challenges that followed the end of slavery only increased the need for spirituals to continue to be heard and sung. The slaves understood the value of their music. This same value and power was also understood for those that supported sharing spirituals after the end of slavery.

The power of the spiritual is in its ability to speak to the world we live in. The history of the spiritual as a genre is characterized by resistance in the face of oppression. While there are certainly examples of songs that exist outside of social objectives, the struggle for change is inherent to the genre through every century the songs have been heard. The roots for this struggle is fueled by its greatest desire—hope. Hope is witnessed at the genre's evolution during the

enslavement of Africans in the Americas, and made more “tangible” at the onset of its concert traditions in the form of “jubilee songs” during the late nineteenth century. Hope became tangible as part of the reaction (e.g., reviews, articles, evidence of popularity) by audiences and musical authorities following their first true glimpse at the power and dignity of spirituals. Such a reaction is important because the development so clearly contradicted the view of “black music” witnessed in minstrelsy.

The juxtaposition between jubilee and minstrel traditions highlights the influence that music can bring to the pursuit of social change. As a result, I consider this juxtaposition important to understanding how we can further cherish and give respect to the value of spirituals. Historical evidence during the late nineteenth century supports the efforts by African Americans in their pursuit to establish or redefine the social perceptions of their race. Among these efforts are significant developments within black cultural expressions by African American musicians. These musicians would directly influence the development of black culture and contribute to the national and international perceptions of African Americans. The “hope” of these musicians contributed to the desire for more positive perceptions of African Americans. As a creative art form, music was the ideal tool to inform new perceptions.

CHAPTER 5. THE FORGE: DETT, DAWSON, AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Between 1900 and 1940, African American composers actively developed spirituals into more complex classical forms.³⁰ Dett and Dawson were among composers that advocated for the rich heritage of spirituals as source material for music compositions. This idea did not belong to them; in fact, a small number of white and black composers explored the possibility in the decades prior. As mentioned in chapter 3, Antonín Dvořák and Harry T. Burleigh advocated for spirituals as American folk music as early as 1895. Both composers are names most often associated with other white and black composers that explored the possibility.³¹ William Marion Cook (1869-1944) was also an early composer associated with Dvořák and Burleigh. Together, these men were the most committed to an American nationalist school that incorporated spirituals into classical art forms.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), a British composer of African descent, also offered the support of spirituals in the establishing of an American nationalist school. During the 1890s, he attended a concert by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in London which he claimed influenced his own compositions.³² From the other side of the Pacific Ocean, Coleridge-Taylor began to experiment with spirituals in compositions such as his *African Romances* (1897) and *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies Transcribed for the Piano* (1905). In addition, his experiments with spirituals also sparked his personal interest into his paternal heritage. Because Coleridge-Taylor

³⁰ Samuel Floyd, Jr., “Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview,” in *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990): 6.

³¹ Antonín Dvořák also advocated for Native American music in the creation of distinctive American school of composition.

³² Josephine R. B. Wright, “Art/Classical Music,” in *African America Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maulsby (New York: Routledge, 2017), 145.

descended from slaves freed by the British soldiers during the Revolutionary War, he felt a connection to the challenges faced by African American composers. This ultimately factored into his decision to comment on the debate of how to establish an American nationalist school. Coleridge-Taylor's international reputation as a composer and conductor made him an ideal advocate. His influence inspired early twentieth-century composers in their quest to establish an American nationalist school through the focus on spirituals.

The influence of Dvořák, Burleigh, Cook, and Coleridge-Taylor merged into a distinct camp. These composers were among others that desired a specific American school of composition. Each supported the spiritual as important in any discussion of an American nationalist school. Other composers, born in the same generation, would join in their movement. Eileen Southern, the outstanding twentieth-century chronicler of African American music, acknowledges the group of African American composers that were a part of this select group of American nationalists: John (J.) Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954), Robert Nathaniel Dett, Harry Lawrence Freeman (1875-1943), Charles L. Cooke (1891-1958), Florence Price (1888-1953), Edward Boatner (1898-1981), William Dawson, and William Grant Still (1895-1978).³³ While Eileen Southern's list is not exhaustive, it does provide a specific list of early African American composers that integrated spirituals into classical forms. These composers were also pioneers for African American composers of classical compositions. However, history has often overlooked their contributions.

While these composers did receive recognition and individual awards for their compositions, the United States still excluded their works in discussions of American

³³ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 448-64.

nationalism. An article in *The Oxford Companion to Music* by Nicolas Temperley reveals a starting point for understanding how their efforts were limited. Temperley's description is limited to nationalism in Western music at its height in European countries during the nineteenth century. His description reads:

Every culture in the world has its own musical language, with certain practices, styles, instruments, scales, and melodies that distinguish it from all others. Those who participate in inherited, traditional music as a natural part of their culture are not necessarily expressing nationalism. But when one culture seeks or attains a position of ascendancy over another, the music of the dominant culture frequently penetrates or even replaces that of the subordinate one, while the latter may resist, and assert the value of its own musical tradition. Both aspects of such a conflict may be termed 'musical nationalism'.³⁴

He concludes that "nationalism is likely to arise when the intellectual leaders of a society are in a position either to impose their culture on others, or to resist an alien culture that has been imposed on their own."³⁵ Neither case occurred for the African American composers active in the United States at the turn of the twentieth-century.

Within his specific examples of nationalism, Temperley acknowledges the presence of two strands: hegemony nationalism and aspiring nationalism. He defines hegemony nationalism as being "imposed on others." The German hegemony is provided as the greatest example for this type of nationalism. Temperley explains that the German hegemony "had a profound influence on the interpretation of musical history. The discipline of musicology was organized and long dominated by German scholars, who tended to overemphasize the importance of the

³⁴ Nicholas Temperley, "Nationalism," *The Oxford Companion to Music*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed February 9, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4676>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

German contribution to musical history.”³⁶ African American musicians may have desired this but the social structure of the United States prevented this from occurring.

Aspiring nationalism best describes the efforts made by composers such as Dett, Dawson, and their contemporaries. Temperley defines aspiring nationalism through the following:

Oppressed peoples and minorities have frequently used music as one of a number of tools to promote their independence. To be effective for the purpose, the music must contain elements that are immediately recognizable as belonging to the culture concerned. This was in opposition to the ‘international’ style, and was fostered by the Romantic reaction to Enlightenment ideas. Certain distinctive scales, rhythms, harmonies, or melodic cells were selected and turned into national symbols. They did not have to be genuinely distinctive artefacts of the culture concerned; it was often more important to use features that were recognizably different from the international style of the dominant culture.³⁷

This description outlines an approach to include spirituals in American nationalism. However, the last line that reads “international style of the dominant culture,” was not a reality for the United States. In comparison to European nations that experienced aspiring nationalism, the United States during the early twentieth century did not support a dominant culture. America only supported a dominant race. The United States was, and currently remains, a nation of immigrants from cultures all over the world.³⁸ While a hierarchy existed among these immigrants, racial identity was still the most dominant attribute for the existing population of the United States. Cultures were too varied and were entering too quickly to completely dominant over the other. The German hegemony is the only culture that comes close and the Germans greatly influenced American art music. However, German culture cannot be taken into

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Between 1882 and 1914, approximately twenty million immigrants came to the United States. The greatest segment of these immigrants arrived from eastern and southern Europe.

consideration as the dominant culture. Their influence originated out of Germany and not from within the United States.

Composers such as Dett and Dawson experienced that nationalism in the United States would not be achieved or appear the same as in other countries. The rise of popular jazz, and it being uniquely American, offered a more desirable approach. Though jazz also has roots as African American music, it also limited the hopes for aspiring nationalism through integrating spirituals and classical music. In 1936, Alain Locke questioned the favor of jazz over the stronger cultural roots of spirituals. Though Locke desired that latter in his discussions of nationalism, he concludes that “Negro idioms will never become great music nor representative national music over the least common denominators of popular jazz or popular ballads.”³⁹

African American musicians contributed heavily to the developments in jazz. Interestingly, the struggle draws comparisons to jubilee songs and minstrel songs: jazz as a popular form of music and the use of spirituals in a classical refinement. Composers like Dett and Dawson were more concerned with elevating the status of spirituals. This objective meant expanding the value of African American music beyond the popularity of jazz. Locke offered that “Neither American nor the Negro can rest content as long as it can be said: ‘Jazz is America’s outstanding contribution, so far, to world music.’”⁴⁰

A return to Temperley’s research addresses the fate of spirituals in the debate on American nationalism. He provides only one paragraph to summarize the conclusion:

In the USA, sporadic resistance to European domination of American music was swamped in the 19th century by the unending stream of European immigrants, and the Germans held sway. Acting on the advice of Dvořák, some American composers treated African-American popular music as their true national folksong, and used it as a building-

³⁹ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC, The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 130.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

block for a national style, with success (for instance) in the work of Copland and Gershwin; while Ives, in a highly personal but unselfconscious manner, introduced into sonatas and other 'classical' genres all kinds of things that had been favourites in his youth, whether popular songs, hymn tunes, or military marches.⁴¹

Though extremely brief, oddly missing from this twenty-first century description of American nationalism are any of the African American composers that supported nationalism through spirituals. Perhaps the brevity and lack of information reflects more on the sentiments of the period than the bias of scholars today. Regardless of the reason, this is not an isolated incident in the study of American music nationalism. Often the attitudes from the original period of this discussion remain in sources we study and research.

An example of the viewpoints of the period are summarized eloquently in the words by another American musicologist, Richard Taruskin. His summary offers the perspective of the highly successful American female composer Amy Beach (1867-1844):

She embarked on her first and only symphony almost immediately after hearing the Boston première of the New World Symphony. In place of the Indian and Negro melodies that Dvořák incorporated or imitated in his work, Beach based the middle movements of her symphony, as well as the closing theme of the first movement, on the melodies of what she called 'Irish-Gaelic' folksongs, for which reason the whole symphony bears the title 'Gaelic'. Thus, Beach's symphony was both a declaration of affiliation with Dvořák's aims and a correction of his methods. 'We of the north', Beach wrote in a letter to the Boston Herald that took explicit issue with Dvořák's prescriptions, 'should be far more likely to be influenced by old English, Scotch or Irish songs, inherited with our literature from our ancestors.'⁴²

In further analysis, Taruskin states the United States could not identify with music indigenous to the nation despite the fact of "living in an increasingly multi-ethnic 'society of immigrants'".⁴³

⁴¹ Temperley, "Nationalism."

⁴² Richard Taruskin. "Nationalism." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50846>.

⁴³ Ibid.

His conclusion on the subject reflects many of the attitudes still present in modern American society:

“Beach identified culturally not with the country of which she happened to be a citizen, but the country from which she descended ethnically – a conviction reinforced for her, as for many other Bostonians as well as other members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, by the assumption that her ‘Celtic’ blood descent identified her as a sort of Ur-American, an American aristocrat.”⁴⁴

The conviction that reinforced Beach has also reinforced and inspired countless other American composers. It can be argued that this same conviction existed for composers that desired for the inclusion of spirituals as original art music of the United States.

Though they are at odds on the surface there is actually little difference to either position of American nationalism. One elevates literature inherited from “ancestors” in mostly European cultures that settled in the United States, while the other elevates literature created by “slaves” from Africa brought to the United States. Perhaps these strands will interlock in the future as musicologists and ethnomusicologists continue study in this area. The legacy of hope discussed in later chapters offer a path of appreciation of American music on both the national and the international level.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6. THE FORGE: HARLEM RENAISSANCE

“It is a rare and intriguing moment when a people decided that they are the instruments of history-making and race-building. It is common enough to think of oneself as part of some grand design. But to presume to be an actor and creator in the special occurrence of a people’s birth (or rebirth) requires a singular self-consciousness. In the opening decades of the Great Depression, black intellectuals in Harlem had just such a self-concept.”⁴⁵

Following the end of World War I, The Harlem Renaissance began a period that fostered greater appreciation for African American culture by both black and white Americans. This period witnessed an outburst of social, cultural, political, literary, and artistic movements from African Americans in Harlem, New York. The movements are significant to American history because of the outpouring of African Americans to developing their cultural identity. Though Harlem has traditionally been recognized as the center, Cary Wintz offers, “The Harlem Renaissance is increasingly viewed through a broader lens that recognizes it as a national movement with connections to international developments in art and culture that places increasing emphasis on the non-literary aspects of the movement.”⁴⁶

The individuals involved with the movement concerned themselves in many areas of African American culture. A primary goal was the rediscovery of African American culture through folk materials (e.g., spirituals) to document and celebrate their cultural heritage.⁴⁷ These folk materials served as sources of inspiration for artistic creation in music, art, and literature. A central ideology developed during the Harlem Renaissance sought “an effort to secure economic, social, and cultural equality with white citizens, and the arts were to be used as a means of

⁴⁵ Nathan Hugins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Press, 1971), 3.

⁴⁶ Cary D. Wintz, “The Harlem Renaissance: What Was It, and Why Does It Matter?” *Humanities Texas* <http://www.humanitiestexas.org/news/articles/harlem-renaissance-what-was-it-and-why-does-it-matter>

⁴⁷ Hugins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 72-80.

achieving that goal.”⁴⁸ This perspective is supported in the literary writing of the significant leaders of the movement.

The significant leaders that appear during the Harlem Renaissance contributed in promoting social change. These leaders were also strong advocates for music—specifically, music of black heritage. The most prominent leaders were: Jessie Redmond Fauset (1882-1961), Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956), James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), and Alain Locke (1885-1954). Each of these leaders were devoted to both African American music and musicians throughout their involvement in the movement. Jessie Fauset, a celebrated female literary figure, gave a voice to emerging African American musicians as editor of *The Crisis*—official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Charles Johnson, first black president of Fisk University, was a strong voice in the promotion of spirituals and other folk materials in higher arts.

Perhaps the most towering figure to music in the early years of the Harlem Renaissance was James Weldon Johnson. His most enduring contributions are found within his collected anthologies of African American folk material: *The Book of Negro Spirituals* (1925), *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* (1926), and *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931). Included in his anthologies of spirituals are musical arrangements by his brother J. (John) Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954). These arrangements are significant to the early development of concert spirituals. James Weldon Johnson also established a reputation as a precursor to the field of ethnomusicology—an early example of the potential of this field. Included in the preface of each of his three anthologies (two music and one poetry), are essays on performance practice, musical

⁴⁸ Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., “Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview,” in *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Samuel Floyd, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.

characteristics, and historical information of spirituals. These essays are important contribution to research on the development of concert spirituals. In his own collection of spirituals, Nathaniel Dett cites the influence of Johnson. Dett affirms the research of Johnson and its influence on his own compositions.⁴⁹

Another important figure to music is the scholar Alain Locke. In fact, Locke is considered today as the most dominant figure at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. For scholars and critics, Locke's book *The New Negro* (1925) coincides with the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance on a national level. *The New Negro* is the definitive text of all the movements and events taking place in African American communities around the United States. Presented in a series of multiple essays, Locke's analysis and commentary speaks to the growing cultural revolution and African American sensibility existing at the time of the writing. The profound impact of the book led many commentators to refer to him simply as the "Dean" of "Father" of the Harlem Renaissance. Locke's own opinion of the movement is summarized in the foreword of his book, "Negro life is not only establishing new contact and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sign, and unusual outburst of creative expression."⁵⁰

The influence of Alain Locke on composers of concert spirituals is profound. He advocated consistently for a return of spirituals to a choral form. Locke's statement was in response to the increasing number of solo settings of spirituals that were popularized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of his most direct quotes states that "it must be

⁴⁹ See Robert Nathaniel Dett, "The Development of the Negro Spiritual," in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Fourth Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936), 4.

⁵⁰ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925), xxvii.

realized more and more that the proper idiom of Negro folk song calls for choral treatment.”⁵¹

This statement expresses a return to origins of the songs which existed in communal not solo singing. Locke praises composers like Dett and Dawson for their compositions that “are turning back gradually to the choral form.”⁵²

Locke was also concerned with the realm of concert music that promoted spirituals in classical forms. In 1925, he challenged American composers to elevate spirituals in classical forms:

Indeed one wonders why something vitally new has not already been contributed by Negro folk song to modern choral and orchestral musical development. And if it be objected that it is too far a cry from the simple folk spiritual to the larger forms and idioms of modern music, let us recall the folk song origins of the very tradition which is now classic in European music. Up to the present, the resources of Negro music have been tentatively exploited in only one direction at a time—melodically here, rhythmically there, harmonically in a third direction. A genius that would organize its distinctive elements in a formal way would be the musical giant of his age.⁵³

The optimism for young composers such as Dett and Dawson is outlined within these words and in similar words spoken by other leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. These remarks reflect the central concern for the future of African American composers and music of the United States.

The foundation for the beliefs of Dett and Dawson are instilled within these ideals of the Harlem Renaissance.

Musical Characteristics of Spirituals

The slaves knew that their songs were the spiritual guarantee of their personal oneness with life, even in a world that forbade them to live as human beings. What they did not know was that a people who could not write their own names—in any language—were

⁵¹ Ibid., 208.

⁵² Locke mentions the name of Dett among other composers returning to the choral form, however Dawson is not mentioned as his career is just beginning. My statement reflects the future efforts by Dawson.

⁵³ Locke, *The New Negro*, 209.

now writing—for all time, one of the grandest pages in the history of the whole world of music. As time went by, musicians the world over became increasingly aware that a musical miracle was taking place in the southern United States.⁵⁴

The following section reviews sources that describe the musical characteristics of spirituals by three Harlem Renaissance figures: Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), Francis Hall Johnson (1888-1970), and James Weldon Johnson. Zora Hurston was an anthropologist and among the influential figures of the Harlem Renaissance. She is remembered most today for her literary works and as a folklorist. Hall Johnson is a major composer of concert spirituals and advocated for spirituals in classical form. In 1926, he also conducted and created the first professional African American choir—the Hall Johnson Choir. Weldon Johnson, as mentioned earlier, was a significant figure to musical thought of the Harlem Renaissance. These three scholars offer three separate perspectives to music. Hurston’s perspective is as a scientist but also as an admirer of music. Hall Johnson represents a perspective as a professional musician. Weldon Johnson is included as early pioneer in the field of ethnomusicology.

The accounts of these scholars reflect the musical considerations of spirituals during the careers of Dett and Dawson. The accounts of Zora Hurston and Hall Johnson are unpublished essays that were released by their estates. Hurston’s “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals” was written in 1933 and appears in *The Negro in Music and Art*, a collection of twentieth-century essays. Hall Johnson’s account is taken from his career as a researcher and choral conductor. In 1965, he wrote an essay on these thoughts on spirituals during his early career in the 1920s. His essay, “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” is featured in *Readings in Black American Music*, an anthology collected and edited by Eileen Southern. The accounts by Weldon Johnson are from the preface

⁵⁴ Hall Johnson., “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” in *Readings in Black American Music*, ed. Eileen Southern. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 270-1.

of his collections: *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*. The three sources each consider the musical developments of spirituals in three areas: 1) rhythm, 2) melody, and 3) harmony. A review of their beliefs, research, and experience will clarify these musical characteristics before and after the concert tradition of spirituals (concert spirituals).

Rhythmic Characteristics of Spirituals

Zora Hurston, Hall Johnson, and Weldon Johnson believe that rhythm is the central element of spirituals in every form and in every age. The connection between spirituals and its rhythmic characteristics is deeply rooted—symbiotic even. In discussion of spirituals, it is impossible to separate the music from its rhythmic characteristic. These scholars each address (or define) the authenticity of concert spirituals in comparison to slave songs and African musical characteristics.

Weldon Johnson observes that rhythm is the dominant element of spirituals and separates it from music developed in Europe. The abundant use of syncopation is the clearest delineation to European music. The ability of a composer of spirituals is often determined by their sensitivity or emotional response to rhythm—how well they grasp the “feel” of it. Weldon points to the transport of popular music (i.e. jazz) to Europe in the early twentieth-century as an example of when this is lost to a composer:

But in Europe, in spite of the vogue of American popular music, based on these rhythms, the best bands are not able to play it satisfactorily. Of course, they play the notes correctly, but any American can at once detect that there is something lacking. The trouble is, they play the notes too correctly; and do not play what is not written down.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925), 1:28.

Weldon Johnson refers to the areas “not written down” as the “swing” of the music. He supports this as an inherent trait of authentic spirituals, and one that separates it from other forms of music. Weldon Johnson also believed that this feeling originated in the functions of music in Africa and continued in America by the African slave. His research promotes two classes of rhythm that evolved during the development of concert spirituals in America. These two classes are described in the following:

In all authentic American Negro music, the rhythms may be divided roughly into two classes—rhythms based on the swinging of head and body and rhythms based on the patting of hands and feet. Again, speaking roughly, the rhythms of the Spirituals fall in the first class and the rhythms of secular music in the second class. The “swing” of the Spirituals is an altogether subtle and elusive thing. It is subtle and elusive because it is in perfect union with the religious ecstasy that manifests itself in the swaying bodies of a whole congregation, swaying as if responding to the baton of some extremely sensitive conductor.⁵⁶

Weldon Johnson’s descriptions of the rhythmic nature are nearly all drawn to feeling. This emotional response should be present in a concert spiritual even though it cannot be written down. However, it is never clear in his descriptions whether this responsibility belongs to performers or to the composers of spirituals. When discussing both performers and spirituals, Weldon Johnson does offer that “the capacity to *feel* these songs while singing them is more important than any amount of mere artistic technique.”⁵⁷

The issue of feelings, or emotional response, is also described by Zora Hurston. In her considerations of rhythm in spirituals, Hurston states, “The nearest thing to a description one can reach is that they are Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects.”⁵⁸ Hurston refers to concert spirituals as “neo-spirituals” and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” (Zora Neale Estate, 1933), 1.

she is very critical of the range of rhythmic treatment by composers. She believed that composers are “losing touch” when they place more emphasis on sound effects. These sound effects are described as imitations of spiritual rhythms by notation only and not in capturing the feelings of rhythm. While an example is not given, Hurston does offer how this is apparent to a performer. She states, “I have noticed that whenever an untampered-with congregation attempts the renovated spirituals, the people grow self-conscious. They sing sheepishly in unison.”⁵⁹ In another perspective Hurston describes a more ideal treatment when she acknowledges that “Negro songs are one and all based on a dance-possible rhythm. The heavy interpretations have been added by the more cultured singers.”⁶⁰ Hurston description is more critical of the performance of the rhythms than the actual spirituals; however, her analysis shares Weldon Johnson’s view that the performance of rhythm (the “feeling”) is as important as the actual notation of rhythm.

As a professional musician, Hall Johnson defines the rhythm of spirituals in more specific music terminology. His considerations are expanded to traditions found in slave songs when describing rhythm—a method shared by the other scholars as well. His research supports that the rhythmic characteristics of spirituals are linked to the polyrhythms of Africa and the “omnipresent drum” in African music.⁶¹ He later states that slaves brought “above all, and underlying all, a supreme understanding of the basic laws of Rhythm—with all its implication and potentialities as applied to music.”⁶² Hall Johnson believed that the rhythm of slave songs helped to develop an “absolute insistence upon the pulsing, *overall rhythm* combining many

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶¹ Johnson., “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” 268.

⁶² Ibid., 271.

varying subordinate rhythms.”⁶³ In this statement, Johnson references the impact of structure to the rhythmic characteristics of slave songs. He concludes that the slaves succeeded in “grafting onto their own native musical gifts whatever they need from the western techniques.”⁶⁴

Following slavery, Hall Johnson believed that the rhythm of spirituals “waned” in each generation removed from the original source material. Johnson recalls, “Even then, in 1925, I saw clearly that, with the changing times, in a few years any spirituals remaining would be found only in libraries.”⁶⁵ This statement harbors his dissatisfaction at the time with efforts to preserve spirituals through audio recordings. Hall Johnson’s desire for preserving spirituals is also a concern for the inadequate notational system for the rhythm of spirituals. His hope was that audio recordings would preserve the rhythmic characteristics of spirituals from previous generations. Hall Johnson claimed this was necessary because the “genuine old spirituals” simply “defy accurate notation but which are nevertheless essential to the character.”⁶⁶

In his conclusion, Hall Johnson returns to the same interpretations as Zora Hurston and Weldon Johnson. He shares in the opinion that the most authentic spiritual-rhythms “defy notation in any known system” and require human emotion—feeling.⁶⁷ This living component to notated rhythm is required in any effort to arrange or perform spirituals. Johnson writes, “no printed word can ever describe the actual *sound* of music, and the written score of any song is

⁶³ Ibid., 271-2.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 271.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 272.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 275.

but a dry skeleton until breathed upon by the living human voice. This is particularly true in the case of the spirituals done in the *true* Negro style.”⁶⁸

Table 4. Summary of Rhythm in Spirituals

	Zora Neale Hurston	Francis Hall Johnson	James Weldon Johnson
Slaves Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one definitive character • Symbiotic relationship to dance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly developed; intricate • The central musical element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes the slaves concept of music is rhythm • Syncopation
Early 20th Century Concert Spirituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes interpretations of rhythm exists in a range • Believes developments lack the improvised nature of the spirituals’ origins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes developments take advantage of meter (metrical phrase) • Believes developments still possess aspects of polyrhythm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes developments have captured the rhythmic feel (sensitivity to rhythm) of spirituals • Believes specific developments influenced by popular music (i.e., ragtime, jazz, blues)

Melodic Characteristics of Spirituals

The melodies of spirituals are traditionally the least developed musical characteristic in spirituals. Though the melodies of slave songs were modified throughout the development of spirituals, they remain largely untouched in most arrangements of concert spirituals. The subtle differences in melodies of concert spirituals typically appear out of harmonic consideration. Because of this fact, only Hall Johnson offers any insight into the origins of the melodies in slave songs. Zora Hurston makes no mention to slave songs and Weldon Johnson devotes more attention to other characteristics.

Weldon Johnson believed that the emphasis on call-and-response as the preferred form of spirituals strengthen the retention of melodies. Since these melodies were being handed from “ear to ear and by word of mouth,” the repeated melodic patterns in a call-and-response form

⁶⁸ Ibid.

preserved most of its original sound. Johnson observes, “It is true that many of these songs have been modified and varied as they have been sung by different groups in different localities. This process is still going on. Sometimes we find two or more distinct variations of the melody of a song. There are also the interchange and substitution of lines. Yet, it is remarkable that these variations and changes are as few as they are.”⁶⁹

Hall Johnson suggests that the unchanged quality of melodies in spirituals allows for “improvisation” and “embellishment” in performance.⁷⁰ His research indicates the presence of these two qualities in music from Africa and in slave songs. Because some of the melodies of slave songs featured a shorter range and collection of pitches (e.g., pentatonic, hexatonic scales), it created an intuitive system of improvising and embellishing a melody. More important than the melody was the rhythmic element of the songs. He believed the music they heard in America gave them a different “feeling for melody” that was not as highly-developed as was their sense of rhythm.⁷¹ Johnson supports that a “more serviceable musical scale” allowed the development of melodies to have a larger range and smaller intervals (e.g., major, minor, and other modal scales).⁷² Though these scales included more pitches, their structure was too limited to allow for the same degree of improvisation and embellishment.

Later in the development of concert spirituals (late nineteenth century and forward), composers chromatically altered pitches to mirror the earlier emphasis on improvisation and embellishment. However, this intent reflects more on performance practice of spirituals than genuine modifications to a melody. Zora Hurston argues that “the real Negro singer cares

⁶⁹ Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 1:21.

⁷⁰ Johnson, “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” 271.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 271.

nothing about pitch. The first notes just burst out and the rest of the church joins in.”⁷³ The chromatic alterations to pitches created melodic interest and was easily discernable to the ear. Several concert spirituals that require solo passages, then and now, maintain this tradition. During the generation of Dett and Dawson, this most often occurred when composing for a known or specific soloist. Chromatic alterations reflect considerations of soloists as well the tradition of improvised and embellished melodies.

Other areas of interest in melodic characteristics include the influence of other musical genres. After 1920, it becomes increasingly difficult to definitively offer differences between tradition and developments to concert spirituals. This difficulty is a result of the interchange of musical characteristics with popular music genres (blues, gospel, and jazz). Hall Johnson warns of this in his essay and offers that if left unchecked this will lead to the disappearance of the spiritual all together. He believed that music-publishing companies were flooding the market with too many spiritual imitations. These songs poorly mimicked the melodies of spirituals or severely corrupted them with popular musical characteristics. Hall Johnson writes:

Of course, all the leading companies would say *their* catalogues are full of Negro songs, even spirituals, and they sincerely believe that. What they really have is conglomeration of all sorts of modern derivatives sung by soloists or small groups in musical arrangements neither Negro nor spiritual. But they caught the public ear. It is good business and everybody’s happy—but me. I have not quarrel with the multiple musical progeny of the spiritual: works-songs, game-songs, and later, chaingang-songs, love-songs, ballads, reels, “blues” and, much later, jazz and the “gospel songs.” They have had their uses and evidently will be around for a long time. Only, the musical progenitor has disappeared—the old Negro spiritual.⁷⁴

While we are still at the mercy of publishers that “flood” the market with spirituals, we have avoided the disappearance of the original melodies as we know them today.

⁷³ Hurston, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” 16.

⁷⁴ Johnson, “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” 273.

Table 5. Summary of Melody in Spirituals

	Zora Neale Hurston	Francis Hall Johnson	James Weldon Johnson
Slaves Songs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melodies support improvisation • Small range 	
Developments to Concert Spirituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modulations a natural occurrence of melodies • Variations in melodies rarely occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scales provide greater range with smaller intervals • Chromatic alterations to scales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromatic alterations to scales • Variations in melodies rarely occur

Harmonic Characteristics of Spirituals

Zora Hurston, Hall Johnson, and Weldon Johnson believed that harmony represented the most developed musical element of spirituals before and after its concert tradition. These scholars agree that for most of the history of spirituals—specifically as slave songs—it is difficult to measure this development. Late nineteenth century scholars debated whether harmony even existed in slave songs. Their debate to determine if this was factual reached a stalemate because of the absence of accurate notated music or recordings of slave songs. Weldon Johnson speculates, “Among the early collectors of the Spirituals there was some doubt as to whether they were sung in harmony. This confusion may have been due in part to the fact that in the Spirituals the Negro makes such frequent use of unison harmony.”⁷⁵

The earliest collection of slave songs was by Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison. They published the first anthology of slave songs in 1867—entitled, *Slave Songs of the United States*. Their notations of slave songs appear in this earliest anthology without

⁷⁵ Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 1:36.

harmonization (monophonic lines). William Francis Allen served as editor of this anthology and offered the following reason for the absence harmonic notation:

There is no singing in *parts*, as we understand it, and yet no two appear to be singing the same thing—the leading singer starts the words of each verse, often improvising, and the others who “base” him, as it is called, strike in with the refrain, or even join in the solo, when the words are familiar. When the “base” begins, the leader often stops, leaving the rest of the words to be guessed at, or it may be they are taken up by one of the other singers.⁷⁶

I believe Weldon Johnson speculation was accurate and describes why Allen was unable to discern harmonies because of the nature of the singing (alternations between unison and spontaneous group singing). Allen’s description implies harmony is occurring, just not in the way he could comprehend. This statement is clarified in the sentences that follow:

And the “basers” themselves seem to follow their own whims, beginning when they please, striking an octave above or below (in case they have pitched the tune too low or too high), or hitting some other note that chords, so as to produce the effect of a marvelous complication and variety, and yet with most perfect time, and rarely with any discord.⁷⁷

These sentences seem to contradict his early statement that “there is no singing in *part*,” and confirm that harmony existed in slave songs. What is most important, and present in Allen’s words, is the improvised (spontaneous) nature of harmony in slave songs.

Slave songs were created by communities of slaves that improvised the harmonic characteristics of their songs. Just as Alain Locke advocated, slave songs are inherently a choral form—a group of people singing together. Because the group can comprise different individuals, with a variety of harmonic possibilities, often no two renditions of a song are exactly similar.

⁷⁶ William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slaves Songs of the United States* (1867; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1995), v.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

This practice is still maintained in the religious performance of spirituals as well as congregational church-singing (gospel) today.

Another aspect maintained is the alternation between unison (one voice) and part singing. This was also observed in jubilee songs and minstrel songs that alternated between soloists and group voices. This type of texture is most often found in concert spirituals that appear in strophic form. This can be considered a further development of the original harmonic concept. However, form is not the lone aspect that informs harmonic considerations. Hall Johnson remarks that “the fusion of all these remarkable ingredients resulted in far more than just *good* part-singing—with new songs and new singers. This amalgam bore golden fruits.”⁷⁸

The “golden fruits” refers to the expanded harmonic language explored in the development of spirituals. Zora Hurston describes this expansion as fresh life to the “neo-spiritual” (concert spiritual), and that “harmony of the true spiritual is not regular.”⁷⁹ She explains that dissonances heard should not be “ironed-out” (made consonant) by arrangers that are expanding harmonic language.⁸⁰ She supports the usage of dissonance an important characteristic to the mood of a spiritual.

Weldon Johnson also supported the expanded harmonic language of concert spirituals. He observed and described one method for how new chords were explored, “I have witnessed some of these explorations in the field of harmony and the scenes of hilarity and back-slapping when a new and peculiarly rich chord was discovered. There would be demands for repetitions, and cries of ‘Hold it! Hold it!’ until it was firmly mastered.”⁸¹ In respect to professionally-trained

⁷⁸ Johnson, “Notes on Negro Spirituals,” 271.

⁷⁹ Hurston, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸¹ Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 1:36.

musicians, Johnson believed composers were even closer to the power of harmony in the concert spirituals. He describes the harmonies of their music as taking on an “orchestra-like timbre” and “enchantment.”⁸²

Hall Johnson offers that it is the “unifying psychological effects” of an expanded harmonic language that creates an enchantment.⁸³ Professionally-trained composers enhanced these effects through their education in Western music-theory. This is significant to the development to concert spirituals. Johnson offers this summary, “For the secret magic lay not so much in the fresh wonder of the tunes and words themselves but in the absolutely *new* musical *style of performance* by their creators.”⁸⁴

Table 6. Summary of Harmony in Spirituals

	Zora Neale Hurston	Francis Hall Johnson	James Weldon Johnson
Slaves Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmony occurs instinctively in community singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmony occurs instinctively in community singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmony occurs instinctively in community singing • Harmony alternates between unison and multiple parts
Developments to Concert Spirituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes dissonances are important and should not be corrected • Believes harmony should allow for improvisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes the influence of European part-singing was a profound development to concert spirituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes harmony is the most developed area of spirituals (36) • Believes that harmony takes on an orchestra-like timbre in the better concert spirituals

⁸² Ibid., 35.

⁸³ Johnson, “Notes on Negro Spirituals,” 271.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 7. THE FORGE AND THE LEGACY OF HOPE

The first part of this disquisition investigated the roots for the legacy of hope at the birth of the spiritual's concert tradition during the late nineteenth century. African Americans sought to establish or redefine the social perceptions of their race. In music, this led to a generation of composers (white and black) that began to experiment with spirituals in classical art forms. The "hope" of these musicians contributed to the desire for more positive perceptions of African American culture. As these musicians continued to work towards redefining social perceptions of African Americans, they subsequently advanced recognition for African American music.

The next generation of musicians, active following the end of World War I (1914-1918), continued to explore African American music. However, the next generation felt and expressed discontent at the limits placed on their musical opportunities. The musicians, several of which participated in the World War I, returned home to a United States that did not offer them the same idea of the democracy they fought in defense of in Europe. Prejudice continued to marginalize African American musicians and music.

Despite the limits of their social environment, these musicians still believed that their music offered a path to transcend social limits placed on people of color. If the world could recognize the value of their music than could they not also accept the value of their race? The "hope" this generation forged was to elevate the status of the spirituals to equal the respect of music from other cultures. These musicians forged their hope through the promotion of spirituals in discussions of American nationalism. This generation of composers developed spirituals into more complex classical forms in their effort to achieve this desire. Dett and Dawson are members of this generation and both are among these composers advocating for the spiritual as

source material for music compositions. These composers “hoped” spirituals would become source material for composers and prefer the term *folk-songs* to describe spirituals.

The intellectual movements known as the Harlem Renaissance provided another voice in the struggle to elevate African American music. The scholarship of figures in the Harlem Renaissance recognized spirituals as America’s truest folk-songs. As a result, research began to define and understand these folk-songs. African American scholars led this effort but were not alone. Their studies provided insight into the musical characteristics of spirituals from the researcher’s past and in from their present.

Review of these sources further the value of spirituals to American music for us today. These songs were shown not belonging *only* to black America, but to *all* of America. While the focus was on one race (African Americans) the development of spirituals incorporated multiple musical traditions and cultures. Table 7 summarizes how these musical traditions were incorporated as indicated in their studies.

Table 7. Development of Spiritual According to Studies from the Harlem Renaissance

	Melody	Rhythm	Harmony
Africa	Modulations a natural occurrence of melodies	Developments still possess aspects of polyrhythm	Dissonances relate to original improvised harmonies of African music
United States	Alterations to preexisting melodies	Developments influenced by popular music (e.g., ragtime, jazz, blues)	Harmony is the most developed area of spirituals
Europe	Scales provide greater range with smaller intervals to preexisting melodies.	Developments take advantage of meter (metrical phrase)	Influence of European part-singing (profound development)

The forging of the legacy of hope took place in the intent for spirituals to be accepted as a vital element of the country's musical identity. These efforts resulted in the performance of spirituals by all ensembles—regardless of race. These efforts also resulted in a belief that spirituals offered singers and audiences of all races an opportunity to connect emotionally. These hopes were severely absent in a social environment that supported laws that encompassed racial segregation. I believe this is what makes this generation worthy of our admiration. Even through oppression and segregation these composers still desired to bring others together through music. Once together they would value not only their work but who they were as individuals. In the end, however, the most measurable success they achieved occurred in the preservation of spirituals for future generations. The hopes of that generation still endure for us today.

CHAPTER 8. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE LIVES OF DETT AND DAWSON

This chapter examines significant events in the lives of Robert Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson. This examination provides further influences in their education and compositional life. These influences were important along their journey towards a new respectability for the concert spiritual. Specific influences are explained through the following three time periods of each composer's life: 1) early musical training, 2) college education, and 3) as conductors of college ensembles.

Because of the interrelationship between this professional period and their concert spiritual compositions, this third area is explored in the succeeding chapters on compositions—chapter seven (Dett) and chapter eight (Dawson). The examination of all three time periods reveals how Dett and Dawson perpetuated the legacy of African American music and contributed to the development of concert spirituals.

Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943)

Robert Nathaniel Dett (Nathaniel) was born on October 11, 1882 in Drummondville, Ontario—a town founded by former slaves that arrived or escaped through the Underground Railroad.⁸⁵ He was called Nathaniel (or Nate) by his father Robert Tue Dett and mother Charlotte Johnson Dett, and was the last born of their four children. Nathaniel's father was a railroad porter that moved from Maryland to Drummondville for work. His position with the railroad kept him away from home for several periods of the year. Consequently, his influence on the early life of Nathaniel was never as consistent as the mother Charlotte Dett. Nathaniel's mother was born in

⁸⁵ Anne Key Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 1.

Canada and received a formal education in Niagara Falls, Ontario.⁸⁶ Charlotte's impact on Nathaniel's life resulted in many of the character traits that would serve throughout his career.

In her biography of Nathaniel Dett, Anne Key Simpson describes Charlotte Dett as a mother that pushed her children towards success. Simpson provides that "the Dett children were never allowed idleness and were encouraged to aim for perfection in all pursuits."⁸⁷ This quality proved central to the character of Nathaniel throughout his life. The following account of his mother suggests additional character traits adopted by Nathaniel:

Mrs. Dett has been described as having high ideals, "a gracious, yet commanding lady of forceful personality and strong character," traits she likely inherited from her mother, Mrs. Washington. Always dressed tastefully in the latest fashions, she became well known in the community through her concern for the unfortunate. The 1910 Niagara County (New York) census showed that Mrs. Dett was a businesswoman as well, who, due to financial necessity, was the proprietor of a rooming house which she owned, free of mortgage.⁸⁸

This account by Simpson offers important descriptions of person Robert Nathaniel Dett would become. The traits evident in Nathaniel's life were of a strong influence of his mother. The similarities to his mother include the following: 1) perfection in all pursuits, 2) high ideals, 3) strong character, 4) concern for the unfortunate, and 5) ambition (businesswoman). Also mentioned in Simpson's account is a reference to the mother of Charlotte Dett. Mrs. Washington, the grandmother, provided Nathaniel with his earliest musical training—specifically, his earliest involvement with spirituals.

⁸⁶ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Early Musical Training

The early musical training of Robert Nathaniel Dett represents an important period during his life and growth as a musician. This period promoted his creativity, musical interests, and musicianship as a performer. An overview of the period reveals that Dett's racial identity did not inhibit his early growth. Racial discrimination was not absent from his life, but it did not prevent opportunities during his early training. Correspondingly, Dett's early music training provided a well-rounded music education and an early recognition towards his natural gifts for music. These two qualities would benefit any composer—regardless of race. However, the shared experiences among other African American composers of Dett's generation acknowledges the rarity of this advantage. Because Canada offered more privileges to its black population, Dett's received unique opportunities that were not often present for people of color living in the United States.

The opportunities and privileges afforded to Nathaniel Dett encouraged his early musical growth. The opportunity to receive a formal education and the privilege of a private piano tutor were among the most influential to Dett as a musician and composer in his adulthood. The formal education of his early life led him to become confident in his future literary contributions—specifically, his award-winning essays on the development of concert spirituals. Dett's piano study was influential because it provided his earliest involvement in improvisation and arranging. His early study also led to several performance opportunities as a teenager where he continued to hone his talents as a performer and composer.

The encouragement outside of the home was beneficial to Dett, and inside the home was equally influential. Dett's family supported his growth as a musician. The members of family that would most influence Nathaniel's earliest music training were his maternal grandmother and both of his parents. By all accounts, Nathaniel was raised in a home with a deep appreciation for

music in a variety of forms. His grandmother, Harriet Washington, became blind and lived with the Dett family sometime near the birth of Nathaniel. She remained in the care of the family until her death—around the year that Nathaniel reached the age of ten.⁸⁹ Later in life, Nathaniel recalled his grandmother singing spirituals. The impact of this singing was not fully-realized by Dett until later in his life. Simpson summarizes an interview where Dett reflects on the subject:

He remembered her as a lady of strong character, locally popular. As a child he was fascinated by her beautifully gentle singing of spirituals, but recalled, after exposure to more formal church hymns, that they sounded slightly strange and unnatural. Mrs. Washington became blind, and Dett later told an interviewer that she always faced the light while singing.⁹⁰

Nathaniel's grandmother "strange and unnatural" music only served as a fascination to his early life. Her songs only became thoroughly appreciated during his college studies. Though her influence was short in years, it proved of permanent value to his future work and interest in African American music.

Nathaniel's early musical interests were led elsewhere. His parents included a wide contrast of musical styles for him to explore. On this influence of his parents, Nathaniel wrote in 1934:

Both my father and mother were educated and both were musical. Father played the piano a little and the guitar very well, and he also sang baritone. For many years he was first bass at the old Mount Olivet Baptist Church, Chicago. My mother played the piano, sang soprano, and as a regular part of the entertainment interest of the town, was fond of getting up concerts of local talent which were patronized by both colored and white people.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Robert Nathaniel Dett, "From Bell Stand to Throne Room," *Etude* 52, no. 2 (Feb. 1934): 79.

The music within the Dett home included music from both popular and classical traditions. It was important that Nathaniel receive a well-rounded cultural education, a viewpoint emphasized specifically by his mother. In addition to exposing Nathaniel to an assortment of music, she also called on him “to recite from memory the poetry of Tennyson and Shakespeare and lengthy passages from the Bible.”⁹² She also encouraged him in the visual arts to further provoke his creativity.

The creativity of Nathaniel was encouraged by his parents who made sure that it included focus on cultural subjects. Their high ideals on education and emphasis on creativity were also present within his early piano study. Of his early piano study, Nathaniel said, “I played the piano since I can remember; no one taught me, I just picked it up: I used to follow my two older brothers to the house while their lessons were in progress.”⁹³ Nathaniel’s brothers, Samuel and Arthur Newton, took piano lessons with a white woman, a Mrs. Marshall, that lived and taught in Niagara Falls, Ontario. As Mrs. Marshall gave lessons to Nathaniel’s older brothers, Nathaniel would sneak into the lessons. When she left the room to retrieve music, Nathaniel would go the piano and play his brother’s lessons by ear. On one occasion, she caught on to his actions and pretended to leave only to catch Nathaniel in the act. According to Nathaniel, “she lifted me off the stool and kissed me, so delighted was she by what she had heard.”⁹⁴ Simpson provides further details on the story of Mrs. Marshall and Nathaniel Dett:

Immediately Mrs. Dett received a note from her, offering to teach Nathaniel free of charge. Thus began his piano study. He admitted to slow progress with actual note-reading, since he could easily play by ear. After hearing Mrs. Marshall play the piece, he imitated her, often adding a fancy endings of his own, or something else that he thought

⁹² Simpson, *Follow Me*, 8.

⁹³ Maud Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and their Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 336.

⁹⁴ Dett, “From Bell Stand to Throne Room,” 79.

might sound better. Very soon he could no longer trick her. Another note was sent to his mother, who assured Mrs. Marshall that at the next lesson Nathaniel would know the notes.⁹⁵

Charlotte Johnson's "motivation" succeeded in the end. Her intervention resulted in Nathaniel learning to read notes, an expansion of his classical repertoire, and an immediate growth to his musical abilities. His talent for improvisation was never lost, however, and remained equally important to his early musical training. His piano study strengthened his musical abilities and his improvisatory skills continued to serve his career. Especially with respect to his later concert spirituals.

Despite his future study of spirituals, these songs were mostly absent from Nathaniel's early musical training (teenage and young adult years). As previously stated, his grandmother's singing was one of the most impactful early experiences with spirituals. However, this occurred only in the first ten years of his life. Nathaniel's musical-attention was led in other directions. Spirituals, while never lost to him at any time of his life, were less influential prior to his college education.

College Education

Robert Nathaniel Dett achieved recognition during his years of college education as a pianist, arranger, and composer. It is also during this period that he began to realize the artistic possibilities of spirituals. Spirituals grew in influence and inspiration through the remainder of his life. Because of commentary left by Dett on this period, it is possible to trace how this influence developed. This development resulted in Dett's ability to synthesize spirituals and classical idioms during his college study.

⁹⁵ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 8.

His first serious music study began in 1901 as a piano student with Oliver Willis Halstead at the Halstead Conservatory in Lockport, New York. His study included his own original piano compositions and piano recitals of Romantic composers such as Robert Schumann (1810-1856), Edward MacDowell (1860-1908), and Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849). He remained at the conservatory until 1903 at which time Halstead impressed upon him to continue music as a career. Dett was accepted to Oberlin college in the fall of that same year.

The years at Oberlin Conservatory (1903-1908) were especially significant to his growth as a musician. Oberlin College is historically significant for being among the first to colleges to open its doors to women and African Americans. The university website of present-day Oberlin College gives the following description: “Founded in 1833 by a Presbyterian minister and a missionary, it holds a distinguished place among American colleges and universities. It was the first college to grant bachelor's degrees to women in a coeducational environment and, historically, was a leader in the education of African Americans.”⁹⁶ Simpson describes in her biography of Dett that by 1900, “approximately one-third of all black graduates of predominantly white institutions had graduated from Oberlin.”⁹⁷ At Oberlin, Dett was a double major in piano performance and composition. These two majors required a five-year program which Dett began in 1903 and completed in 1908.

During his years at Oberlin, Dett had an encounter with spirituals and was reintroduced to the music in a way he never conceived. His memory of spirituals sounding “strange and unnatural,” quickly vanished during his attendance at the performance of second movement of Dvořák’s *String Quartet in F Major* (1893). This movement introduced a new vision to his

⁹⁶ “About Oberlin,” Oberlin College, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://new.oberlin.edu/about/>.

⁹⁷ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 17.

creative mind. Simpson reports that “for perhaps the first time he was able to absorb the concept of using traditional folk tunes in serious music.”⁹⁸ In his own words, Dett also describes the event as extremely impactful:

But the most vivid and far reaching memory I have of Oberlin was the result of a visit of the famous Kneisel String Quartet, who played as part of one of their programs a slow movement by Dvořák, based on traditional airs. Suddenly it seemed I heard again the frail sweet voice of my long departed grandmother, calling across the years; and, in a rush of emotion which stirred by spirit to its very center, the meaning of the songs which had given her soul such peace was revealed to me.⁹⁹

Upon Dett’s graduation in 1908 the memory of this event still lingered inside him. It pulled at his consciousness. Even as he was encouraged by his professors to pursue a performance career as a “Negro musical prodigy,” and to contemplate study in Europe. However, Dett believed his path belonged in another direction and he believed spirituals would have a role. After graduation, Dett opted to enter the teaching profession.

The decision to teach proved beneficial to Dett’s vision of combining spirituals and classical forms. Teaching positions for African Americans in higher education were only offered at “negro institutions” which were typically located in the Southern United States. However, such a position offered Dett his first opportunity to study spirituals in communities with strong connections and traditions. Dett offers the following on how this opportunity took shape:

After graduation from Oberlin, I got a position as a teacher in Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee. This is a Negro Institution. There, through practical experience, I began to learn how to teach. Within two years I had over one hundred students in piano and had developed an unusually good choir. I learned many new Negro songs from the students and community people there.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁹ Dett, “From Bell Stand to Throne Room,” 80.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 78.

James Lovell points to the impact of Dett confronting spirituals in a more “natural environment” than in past experiences of Dett’s life. Lovell observes, “A part of his inspiration came from attending meetings of ex-slaves in the backwoods. He saw how their faces showed a self-abnegation, evidence their being transported to another world.”¹⁰¹

At Lane College in 1908, Dett began a life-long journey dedicated to developing concert spirituals. His journey included leaving his position to continue graduate study. Dett alternated between employment and education for the next two decades of his life. His graduate study included research and a literary output on the various topics surrounding spirituals. Dett continued his music study at Oberlin College (Summer 1913) American Conservatory of Music in Chicago (1915), Northwestern University (1915), Columbia University (Summer 1915), Harvard University (1919-1920), and American Conservatory at Fontainebleau in Paris (Summer 1929). Dett also received a master of music degree from Eastman School of Music in 1932, and two honorary doctorate degrees from Howard University (1924) and Oberlin College (1926).

William Levi Dawson (1899-1990)

William Levi Dawson (William) was born on September 26, 1899 in Anniston, Alabama to parents George Dawson and Eliza Starkey Dawson. William was named in honor of his mother’s father, William Starkey, and his father’s brother, Levi Dawson. William was the first born and became the oldest of seven children by his parents. William’s mother was educated at a freedman school in Alabama and came from a family with “extensive property holdings.”¹⁰² However, it is believed that his father never received an education, and was born as a slave in

¹⁰¹ James Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972). 416-17.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 19.

Georgia before migrating to Alabama.¹⁰³ Consequently, William’s parents held differentiating views on the value of education.

While his mother believed strongly in a formal education, his father felt that hard work or an apprenticeship was a more desirable path. However, education was extremely important to William even during his youngest years. This debate in the Dawson household eventually led to complications for William when he expressed his desire for a formal education. As the oldest child, and as the oldest male, William was expected to assist in providing for their family. As a child, William held apprenticeships in the town of Anniston. He was content in his roles because of his curiosity for the world around him. However, the world around him also included music. As he grew into his early teenage years, a growing desire for studying music began to outweigh his “responsibilities to the family” in both his heart and mind.

Early Musical Training

Anniston, Alabama provided very few opportunities for the brand of education William Dawson desired. The town lacked a black public school despite the fact the population was predominantly African American. Formal music concerts were also a rarity in Anniston, perhaps even nonexistent to African Americans in the “Jim Crow” setting of the Southern town.¹⁰⁴ However, the town did possess a rich heritage in the singing of spirituals, and a proximity of one hundred miles near the Tuskegee Institute—an institution designed for the sole purpose of educating African Americans of various ages.

¹⁰³ Mark Hugh Malone, “William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1981), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Crow Laws were state and local laws that appeared in the Southern United States to enforce racial segregation. These laws governed Southern society legally from the Reconstruction era through 1965.

The rich heritage in Anniston of spirituals existed through the migration of former slaves and their families to growing industrial town.¹⁰⁵ These individuals bonded together to form a community that included several amateur musicians (singers and instrumentalists). The African American community in Anniston enjoyed a variety of informal music every day of the week. William took part in this experience and was drawn to the sounds he heard around him in his daily activities. In his dissertation of William Dawson, Mark Malone provides the following description of how this community influenced his early musical training:

William heard the singing in his community and eagerly joined in. His precocious perception of music manifested itself in many ways. He picked out rhythms from the music he heard and experimented with them. He would even use the rhythmic patterns to make up dances based on current events he heard about. He tried to fashion a musical instrument out of a cigar box he found. There was a little church near his home, and young William would go to the church on Wednesday nights and stand outside to listen to the prayer meeting, especially the singing. He had never heard such beautiful sounds and was always fascinated by the lovely tones emanating from the evening worship.¹⁰⁶

Dawson was consistently surrounded by music both in his community and at home. His early life reflects an intimacy especially with spirituals. The singing of spirituals in his community appears to have been very strong. Dawson's mother Eliza is also reported to have sung spirituals around him. Dawson's constant exposure to spirituals benefited his grasp of the music's characteristics. Of the most prominent was rhythm; or, what W. E. B. Dubois refers to as "the rhythmic cry of the slave" and as "the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas."¹⁰⁷ Dawson's increased understanding of rhythm offers one explanation for the reason it

¹⁰⁵ In 1873, the Woodstock Iron Company was built on two-thousand acres of land that eventually became Anniston. The town added other industries in the decades that followed as the surrounding area grew in population.

¹⁰⁶ Malone, "William Levi Dawson," 20-1.

¹⁰⁷ W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Blue Heron Press, 1953), 251.

features so often later in Dawson's compositional life. Dawson absorbed the music around him and he was a part of it as much as it was a part of him.

William Dawson also held a deep affection for instruments which led to his attempt to create one for himself. An attachment to instruments was inspired by a band group with ties to the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama.¹⁰⁸ This group of men had a fifteen-piece band directed S.W. Gresham—a previous bandmaster at the Tuskegee Institute.¹⁰⁹ Graduates of Tuskegee were not uncommon to the Anniston, many settled in or around the area for employment. The presence of these individuals and their stories about Tuskegee greatly influenced Dawson to the possibilities outside of his town and in music. The music heard by the small band in Anniston sparked his interest in the study of music. According to McMillan:

Another important influence was a group of black men in town who played in a band. This band was led by S.W. Gresham, who had been the bandmaster at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Dawson had his heart set on playing the trombone but had to settle for the mellophone that Gresham loaned to him. He learned in an informal setting and made rapid progress by getting assistance from the men in the band. Gresham recognized the talent of the youngster and began to give him private lessons.¹¹⁰

During Dawson's early music training, the only formal music education that existed were in his private lessons with Gresham on mellophone. Unfortunately, these lessons only lasted one month as Gresham's death ended Dawson's private lessons. However, this did not halt Dawson's desire to learn an instrument and play in a band.

Dawson began to turn his imagination to the Tuskegee Institute and playing in the Tuskegee band. He started asking questions around the community for more information about

¹⁰⁸ The Tuskegee Institute was founded by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a strong advocate for African Americans educational institutions in the South.

¹⁰⁹ William Robert McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1991), 66.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

the school and its founder Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). Both the school and Washington were known widely among African Americans in the South. Malone describes Tuskegee in his dissertation as a “mecca” for early twentieth-century African Americans because of the school’s development of educational opportunities for people of color.¹¹¹ Washington was a figure equal to the prestige of his institution. He believed strongly in the education of African Americans, and advocated nationally on his personal views. Dawson was drawn to Booker T. Washington but enticed by the prospect of joining the Tuskegee band.

William Dawson believed that if he were to join the Tuskegee band he would need to consider carefully his next steps. While his mother was supportive of his desire, his father did not feel the same. William conserved a portion of his earnings from his apprenticeship, and from various side-jobs. He knew he needed to prepare accordingly if he were to make it to Tuskegee, so he hid his efforts from his father. His secrecy also included a monthly payment of fifty-cents to a Professor N. W. Carmichael for tutoring him in reading, writing, and arithmetic. These study sessions occurred in the late evenings before dark.¹¹² William’s mother also helped to conceal his plans. She motivated Dawson towards attending Tuskegee.

At fourteen-years old, William Dawson decided to leave home and travel to Tuskegee.

With the help of others in Anniston, William leaves to begin the next chapter of his life.

Malone’s interview with Dawson provides the following details:

In September of 1913, the time had come for young William to leave home. Sale of his bicycle yielded the six dollars necessary for the train fare from Anniston to Tuskegee. On Sunday afternoon, George Dawson went to church and William's plan was put into action. Collaborating with him, his neighbors, the Beavers family, took his trunk. Their son George planned to check the trunk as his own on his ticket to Tuskegee the following morning. Upon returning from church, George Dawson quickly noticed that William's

¹¹¹ Malone, “William Dawson,” 27.

¹¹² Professor Carmichael was only one of two individuals that would agree to teach black children. For a background on the professor please, see Malone, “William Dawson,” 30.

trunk was missing and immediately began searching for his son. William had already walked to another railroad depot several miles distant, so the elder Dawson did not find his son at the Anniston station. Once aboard the 2 A.M. Southern Railroad train bound for Birmingham, William locked himself in the men's room and emerged only after the train had departed. In Birmingham, he boarded the Louisville and Nashville train that took him to Tuskegee. At that time, trains pulled right onto the Tuskegee Institute campus and Dawson was in awe of the buildings that comprised the school he had sought so long to attend. With only \$1.50 in his pocket, he stepped off the train to begin a new challenge.¹¹³

College Education

When William Dawson arrived at Tuskegee he was only fourteen years old. Dawson would spend the next eight years of his life under the care and guidance of the faculty there. Tuskegee was designed to accommodate students of all ages and abilities. Washington's school had highly functional system of education for the students they taught. The system was built on the belief students should be instructed in both basic subjects and industrial arts. Washington states in his autobiography that he was determined to have a self-sufficient campus created and maintained by the students.¹¹⁴ At Tuskegee Dawson found a new home. He would need to rely on his ambition and determination to excel in his classes and fulfill his dreams in learning more about music.

Washington considered music a core subject and required every student to take music training courses at Tuskegee. Instrumental and vocal music programs were also available for students that chose that path. Washington describes the music program in an early autobiography in which he writes, "though considerable work has been done, we have been able within the last

¹¹³ Malone, "William Dawson," 30-1.

¹¹⁴ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (South Kingstown, RI: Millennium Publications, 2015), 64.

few years to furnish a systematic and thorough course of study. The course in pianoforte embraces four years. The institution owns eight pianos, two cabinet organs and a library of music. Vocal music is taught to the classes in the academic department throughout the entire course.”¹¹⁵ Music was a part of academic studies and singing was a constant activity throughout the daily lives of the students. Washington also stated, “Tuskegee students are famous for their fine singing of plantation melodies, and it is the object of the Institute to make these old, sweet, slave songs a source of pride and pleasure to the students.”¹¹⁶ These plantation melodies (spirituals) were performed by the students in a variety of weekly and daily functions of the institution. Malone points to Dawson being especially fond of the morning blessing “Awake My Soul” that was sung by hundreds of students every morning before breakfast.¹¹⁷

Music ensembles were also available to students at Tuskegee as Washington was well-aware of the fundraising power a performing ensemble possessed. Washington excelled at finding exposure for Tuskegee and obtaining funding from a variety of sources. Washington offered the following account about the ensembles present on the campus of Tuskegee:

There are at Tuskegee the following musical organizations: A Choir, consisting of seventy-five voices; a choral society, consisting of one hundred and fifty voices, organized for the study of music from the masters; glee club, consisting of forty male voices; glee club consisting of twenty female voices; male quartette, whose work is to travel in the North. The institution maintains a splendid brass band of thirty pieces, which is instructed by a competent director, employed by the school. Any student possessing a knowledge of wind instruments will be given a chance to try out for the band; but this knowledge is not essential to membership. The band plays every school day morning for inspection and drill.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work* (Chicago: J. L. Nichols, 1900), 59.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Malone, “William Dawson,” 33.

¹¹⁸ Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 59.

William Dawson heard the band every day before the opportunity ever presented itself to join. The dream that led him to Tuskegee was because of its band. His dream was inspired in the interactions with the band in Anniston and the private lessons on mellophone.

Dawson continued to dream about learning the trombone and playing within Tuskegee's band. Captain Frank L. Drye, director of the instrumental program at the time at Tuskegee, provided Dawson a trombone and an audition with the band. According to Malone, "Realizing that he would have to sight-read, he obtained a copy of *Music Self Taught*, published by J. W. Pepper of Cincinnati, to study the rudiments of music. He went straight to his room without supper and diligently studied."¹¹⁹ This proved successful for him, as Captain Drye accepted Dawson in the band. Despite Dawson's deficiency in music theory, Drye recognized Dawson's determination to learn all he could about music.

Dawson's developed as a musician once joining the band. His dream became one of the most influential learning experiences in his life. Captain Drye continued to feed Dawson's determination and even provided Dawson the opportunity to lead the band as a student-conductor. Extra duties also included serving as an instrumental instructor to other band members. As Dawson performed these duties, he obtained the skills needed to become a band conductor. This was a common design of instruction at Tuskegee of learning through such responsibilities. These responsibilities allowed Dawson to apply his developing knowledge of music theory, learn new instruments, and how to instruct others.

Captain Drye was only one of the several influential music teachers Dawson had at Tuskegee. Dawson also received piano instruction and music theory instruction from Alice Carter Simmons (a niece of Booker T. Washington) and choral studies with Jennie Cheatham

¹¹⁹ Malone, *William Dawson*, 34.

Lee. The piano and music theory instruction increased Dawson's musical knowledge and fostered his creativity. His membership in the Institute Choir with Jennie Lee was significant to his future career as a choral conductor. Malone provides the following about Dawson's membership with the choir at Tuskegee:

As a member of the Institute Choir, Dawson was exposed to choral and vocal solo literature. Directed by Jennie Cheatham Lee, the choir developed into an excellent performing ensemble. Jennie Lee's extensive background in choral music was highlighted by her having known the original Fisk University Jubilee Singers. Her impeccable speech and careful personal example in rehearsal resulted in flawless, clear choral diction. Mrs. Lee was a very special person in William Dawson's life for she encouraged him at every turn. She would allow him to sit in the back of her other classes when he could be excused from work. He loved and admired her, often calling her "Mother Lee."¹²⁰

From "Mother Lee" Dawson discovered choral rehearsal techniques that connected back to the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This evidence supports the ensemble's impact on Dawson. The Institute Choir and choral society ensembles did not exclusively perform spirituals. Dawson also received his first full exposure to literature by European composers.

Music by European composers was significant to and admired by Dawson, specifically Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). In 1918, Dawson performed beside Alonzo Small as members of Tuskegee's Male Quartette. The two formed a close bond and were known to playfully call each other by the name "Ludwig." Malone's offers the following on how this began for the two friends:

The two musicians called one another "Ludwig" in their great admiration of Ludwig van Beethoven. As the young men studied the history of music, they found that many composers were dominated, responsible to monarchs and patrons. Yet, Beethoven was a "free" composer, one who wrote as his soul dictated. This was important to the young men. Their thirst for music and the many experiences they shared, kept William and Alonzo close friends.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹²¹ Ibid., 37.

The Male Quartette¹²² served in a public relations capacity for Tuskegee. The ensemble promoted the educational philosophy of Washington and helped to secure funding for the school. The group travelled the entire summer of 1918 throughout the Northeastern United States and into Canada. Dawson also featured a trombone soloist at many of the stops, accompanied by his friend Alonzo Small.¹²³

Travel with the Male Quartette gave Dawson a view of life outside of Alabama. The trip also allowed him share ideas with others in a different cultural setting. In one of Dawson's last summers at Tuskegee, the ensemble was asked to participate in the Redpath Chautauqua circuit.¹²⁴ Malone comments on an interesting story about the Chautauqua circuit from his interview with Dawson. Malones writes, "Dawson also remembered that the Chautauqua circuit had passed through Anniston when he was a boy. Because Negroes were not allowed to attend, he could not go to any of the programs. Yet, only a few years later he was a participant on the circuit."¹²⁵

In May 1921, Dawson graduated from the Tuskegee Institute and found no problem in finding a job. In the Fall of the same year, Dawson was hired at Kansas Vocational College as

¹²² During Dawson's membership in 1918, the group was not a quartet but a quintet: one first-tenor, two second-tenors, one baritone, and one bass. Dawson performed as one of the two second tenors.

¹²³ Malone, *William Dawson*, 39.

¹²⁴ For details about the Redpath Chautauqua circuit, see Irene Briggs and Raymond F. DaBoll, *Recollections of Lyceum and Chautauqua Circuits* (Porter's Landing, MN: The Bond Wheelwright, 1969).

¹²⁵ Malone, *William Dawson*, 39.

their instructor of instruments and instrumental ensembles. While an instructor, Dawson desired to continue his education at nearby Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. However, because the Tuskegee Institute was not yet an actual college, the school would not admit him. The Dean of the School of Music, Henry Stearns, believed that Dawson's strong musical experiences provided him knowledge equivalent to college-level music courses. Stearns provided Dawson an examination to test his musical proficiency. As expected, Dawson passed and he was admitted into the school.

At Washburn, Dawson studied composition, orchestration, and began a personal study of the double bass. From these areas, Henry Stearns felt that Dawson had great potential as a composer. Stearns tried earnestly to persuade him towards that path, and encouraged Dawson to continue his compositional study with Adolph Weidig (1867-1931) in Chicago. Dawson, however, wanted to travel to New York to study trombone at the Ithaca Conservatory. Neither path took place. After Dawson left his position at Kansas Vocational College his next stop brought him to Kansas City, Missouri.

Because he was unable to travel to New York to study, Dawson decided to try and take classes at Horner Institute in Kansas City. However, admittance to Horner was made impossible because of the color of Dawson's skin. Malone writes the following account given by Dawson:

The registrar at Horner Institute refused to enroll Dawson in the school, just as officials at Washburn College in Topeka had done a year earlier. He was told that they had a policy that did not allow Negroes to attend classes. He replied that he wanted to study, not attend classes. Trying to avoid controversy, Institute officials went to music theory teacher Regina Hall inquiring if there were a possibility of teaching a young Negro man privately. Mrs. Hall was a lady of New England background with varied musical

expertise. She welcomed the eager student, disapproving of the school's segregationist policies.¹²⁶

As Dawson continued into his study at Horner Institute, he was eventually able to receive instruction from other professors. At Horner Dawson studied piano, trombone, composition, and theory (counterpoint). In Spring of 1926 and at the age of 26, William Dawson was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree with the highest honors. Dawson's study of composition was again at the forefront of his musical accomplishments. One of Dawson's instrumental compositions was chosen for performance at his commencement. However, Dawson's race again became an issue at Horner. This is outlined in the following narrative by Malone:

At commencement, Dawson was not allowed to sit with other graduates but had to sit in the balcony reserved for Negroes. His composition, "Trio in A" for violin, cello, and piano was chosen for presentation by members of the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra. Despite the apparent enthusiastic appreciation by the audience, Dawson was not permitted to acknowledge the thunderous applause.¹²⁷

Dawson's passion for composition increased after his graduation. He wanted to learn more and recalled Henry Stearns at Washburn University suggest he study in Chicago with Adolph Weidig. Weidig worked at the American Conservatory in Chicago and Dawson decided to pursue that path.

When Adolph Weidig met William Dawson in the Fall of 1926 "he was immediately impressed and gave Dawson a scholarship for compositional study."¹²⁸ Adolph Weidig taught Dawson composition and "freed Dawson from strict counterpoint" that he studied at Horner.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 48-9.

¹²⁷ McMillan, *The Choral Music of William Dawson*, 74-5.

¹²⁸ Malone, *William Dawson*, 52.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 51.

Dawson developed his compositional style under the study of Weidig and eventually earned a Master's degree from the American Conservatory in 1927.

Following his graduate degree, Dawson continued finding opportunities to further his compositional study. Other significant study included Thorvald Otterstrom (1868-1942). Otterstrom encouraged Dawson to incorporate spirituals into a symphony. Dawson had already started work on his *Negro Folk Symphony* (1934) but his study with Otterstrom motivated him to continue his efforts. This same effort to work more closely with spirituals became important as Dawson began another path. This path led back home to Alabama and the Tuskegee Institute.

In Context

The foundation for the legacies of Dett and Dawson materialized within their individual experiences during their early musical training and college education. The stories of Dett and Dawson are of great contrast. However, each story brings a deeper value to the forging of their legacy of hope. The next three chapters bring the ideas behind a legacy of hope into focus. It gives meaning and value to the struggles and desires of the lives that came before and after Dett and Dawson. It provides each of us “hope.” This is their legacy that we share.

A legacy can describe something that is transferred from one generation to the next. Hope can describe an attitude of expectation for a positive outcome or change. When combined, a “legacy of hope” is the transference of an optimistic attitude to future generations. The music of Robert Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson advanced this attitude in the face of resistance and barriers based on their race. Through it all, the optimism of Dett and Dawson never faltered. Both composers held “faith in the ultimate justice of things;”¹³⁰ their strength is a legacy of hope

¹³⁰ W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

for our generation. It is this strength that embodies the concert spirituals of Dett and Dawson. Their legacy reflects a constant striving for a future better than the past.

CHAPTER 9. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE CHORAL MUSIC OF ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT

This chapter examines the significance of the choral works by Robert Nathaniel Dett to the choral repertoire of the United States. Dett's choral works reflect his intent for spirituals to be accepted as a vital element of the country's musical identity. The struggle to achieve this goal is first perceived in the late nineteenth century when audiences were introduced to spirituals by African American performing ensembles. Dett was fully aware of the legacy of these ensembles and of their struggles; his choral works are part of a lineage that extends from these musicians. Dett contributed to American choral music with a new respect for spirituals. This was Dett's *legacy*. Dett's legacy can be interpreted as resulting in performances by all ensembles—regardless of race. This was Dett's *hope*.

Nathaniel Dett's hope is evident in his racially-inclusive approach to compositions. This inclusive approach has provided greater accessibility to the performance of spirituals. In addition, Dett's "legacy of hope" supports his career-goals and yields a specific interpretation to his choral works. This chapter investigates Dett's choral works in the following two areas: 1) the greater accessibility to spirituals, and 2) the composer's intent for his music. How Dett offered greater accessibility to spirituals is examined in scholarly sources (e.g., books, dissertations) that discuss Dett's choral music. The conclusions by these sources are supported through selected examples of Dett's choral music that reveal his concern for elevating spirituals beyond its traditional folk-song roots. The second area, Dett's intent for his music, is interpreted through sources from his literary output (i.e., essays, lectures, reviews) that convey his intentions. These interpretations support Dett's attitude towards issues of race and culture.

There are several studies that comment on these characteristics of Nathaniel Dett's music. The biography by Anne Key Simpson—*Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett*—is the most comprehensive source on Dett and his music.¹³¹ Published in 1993, Simpson's biography presents a chronological view of the life of Dett and offers thorough discussions of his musical compositions. The 1967 dissertation by Vivian Flagg McBrier, acknowledged by Simpson as the first in-depth biographer of Dett, is also a significant biographical source of Dett and his music.¹³² McBrier's dissertation, "The Life and Works of Robert Nathaniel Dett," is also structured chronologically but with an added focus on Dett as an educator and as a "social-thinker." Her analysis reviews Dett's music in the social climate of his life and in his role as a social leader. The dissertations of Carl Gordon Harris (1971)¹³³ and Arthur Lee Evans (1972)¹³⁴ are two additional reviewed sources that investigate of Dett's choral works. Both dissertations are of a similar subject: the analysis of choral music by selected African American composers. Dett's music is included in their analysis and discussions of choral compositions.

Nearly every choral composition by Dett was composed while serving as choral director at traditional Black colleges. Dett's interest turned to spirituals during his first appointments at Lane College (1908-1911) and the Lincoln Institute (1911-1913). However, many his choral works were composed while he was the choral director at Hampton Institute (now Hampton

¹³¹ Anne Key Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993).

¹³² Vivian Flagg McBrier, "The Life and Works of Robert Nathaniel Dett" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1967).

¹³³ Carl Gordon Harris, "A Study of Characteristic Stylistic Trends Found in the Choral Works of a Selected Group of Afro-American Composers and Arrangers" (DMA diss., University of Missouri, 1972).

¹³⁴ Arthur Lee Evans, "The Development of the Negro Spiritual as Choral Art Music by Afro-American Composers with an Annotated Guide to the Performance of Selected Spirituals" (PhD diss., University of Miami).

University) from 1913 until 1931. Simpson states, “The reverent attitude for spirituals which Dett imparted to the Hampton Choir carried over to their beautiful singing of them, especially the ones which he set, and largely accounted for the group’s high rank in choral circles.”¹³⁵ Simpson notes that the approximate number of Dett’s choral works is at forty (with exception to his five collections of spirituals and two oratorios) and that his most popular compositions are from his years at Hampton.¹³⁶ After Dett left Hampton in 1931 he explored other musical pursuits that included furthering his education at the Eastman School of Music. In 1937, Dett accepted a position as choral director at Bennett College—a college for women.¹³⁷ Dett remained at Bennett College until his death in 1943.

Throughout his career, Dett’s choral works were composed more in the style of spirituals than as simple arrangements of spirituals. Dett imagined entirely new compositions that *manipulate* the distinct musical characteristics (e.g., rhythm, melody, harmony) of spirituals as opposed to arrangements of the source material (folk-songs). Specifically, Dett’s interest was in the creative use of spirituals for compositions, not in creating new spiritual-arrangements. While Dett acknowledges the influence of spirituals to his own compositions, he resists ever referring to his choral works as “spirituals” or as arrangements of spirituals. This is continued within his literary output (e.g., essays, reviews, letters) where the term “folk song” is preferred to the term “spiritual.” For example, when Dett outlines this philosophy on the role spirituals could serve in compositions: “The folk character is gained in some instances from only a line of folk song, serving merely as a theme upon which an entirely new composition is created. All the material

¹³⁵ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 444.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 445-6.

¹³⁷ Bennet College was founded in 1873 as a normal school for African American men and women (freedmen). The college transitioned into a women’s college in 1926.

used in the development of the folk song is, as far as possible, derived from the folk song sources or very closely imitates folk song style.”¹³⁸ Dett hoped that other composers (e.g., black, white) would adopt this philosophy and view spirituals as valuable source material for their compositions.

The evidence found in Dett’s choral music supports his philosophy of the potential spirituals (folk-songs) possess for composers. Because Dett’s choral music implements his philosophy, this potential is revealed in his own treatment of spirituals. Studies by Vivian McBrier and Anne Simpson offer insight in this treatment. McBrier’s study of Dett’s choral suggests that Dett, as a “competent craftsman,” developed a compositional use of spirituals that served his creativity as a composer and musician.¹³⁹ McBrier’s examples are endorsed by Simpson. Simpson’s concludes from the study by McBrier that “Dett’s choral pieces should all be classified as original works,” despite the strong influence of spirituals.¹⁴⁰ Simpson’s defends this statement through a list of the examples from the study by McBrier. This following list is considered here as evidence of how Dett provided greater accessibility to spirituals: “using the entire folk song/spiritual or mere fragment, absolute or relative repetition of the theme, expansion, contraction, variation or inversion of the melodic ideas, rhythmic diminution or augmentation, textural mutations and repetitions, and antiphonal or contrapuntal treatment.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Simpson’s biography of Dett includes a letter he wrote and retrieved from the Oberlin College Archive, see Simpson, *Follow Me*, 445.

¹³⁹ McBrier, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Simpson, *Follow Me*, 446.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 446.

Dett's *O, Holy Lord* (1916) provides several examples from this list and illustrates his ability to compose in the style of spirituals.¹⁴² Within this work Dett uses 1) textural repetitions, 2) the repetition of themes, 3) expansion and contraction of texture, and 4) rhythmic diminution and augmentation. The structure of the *O, Holy Lord* is derived from two themes that correspond to the following two phrases of text: 1) "O, Holy Lord," and 2) "Done with sin and sorrow." These themes, and its texts, are repeated over seven sections (textural repetition, repetition of themes). Table 8 indicates the pervading features of each section of *O, Holy Lord*.

Table 8. *O, Holy Lord* (1916) Sections and Pervading Features

Section	Measures	Features
1	mm. 1-8	Texture (Men's voices only)
2	mm. 9-16	Texture expansion (adds alto), theme variation (phrase 1)
3	mm. 17-24	Texture expansion (adds soprano), repetition of themes
4	mm. 25-34	Rhythmic diminution ("holy"), repetition of theme of section 2
5	mm. 35-44	Texture contraction, repetition of themes
6	mm. 45-64	Rhythmic augmentation, Texture expansion, repetition of themes
7	mm. 65-73	Texture contraction, rhythmic augmentation

Central to the composition of *O, Holy Lord* is the repetition of text and melodic themes. The text remains consistent throughout the piece with both phrases of texts appearing in each of the seven sections. Additionally, the melodic themes provide a consistent system of contrast in each repetition. Dett contrasts the melodic themes of the two phrases of text by alternating between major and minor tonalities¹⁴³. Example 3 indicates one iteration of the major and minor tonalities

¹⁴² The work is listed by the publisher G. Schirmer as an anthem for eight-part (SSAATTBB) mixed voices.

¹⁴³ The only exception is a variation of the first theme appearing with the text "Holy, Holy, is the Lord" in two sections (mm. 9-16 and mm. 25-34). In this exception, Dett alters the

in the themes of both phrases of text. A G major tonality appears most frequently in the repeat of the melodic theme of “O, Holy Lord,” while an e minor tonality appears in every repeat of the melodic theme of “Done with sin and sorrow.”. The only variation to the tonality of the first phrase of text appears between measures 45 through 64. In these measures (section six), the first theme appears in C major while the second theme remains in e minor. (ex. 4).

Dett treats this section with half and whole notes through rhythmic augmentation of the first phrase’s melodic theme. The result of longer note values creates a section of sustained pitches that function as harmonic support for the second phrase of text. The second phrase of text, “Done with sin and sorrow,” maintains its original rhythmic values and is repeated by the bass voices six times.

The last nine measures (mm. 65-73) is the only section that both phrases of texts are varied together (ex. 4). The melodic theme of the first phrase is altered to appear as a mini-arch form. The phrase begins as a series of ascending quarter-notes in parallel-motion (soprano and alto voices) that then descend step-wise from measure 65 through 68. The end of the arch (m. 69) is marked by a root position e minor chord and whole notes in all four voices. The second phrase of text begins in measure 70 where the rhythm of the melodic theme is augmented to half and whole notes. In addition, a longer duration is implied on the word “sin” where Dett provides a fermata to further express the word.

rhythm (shorter note values) and inverts the melodic idea (ascending melody) to reflect the variation.

G MAJOR (Phrase 1) E MINOR (Phrase 2)

mp
O ho-ly Lord, _____

piú marcato
O _____ ho-ly Lord, Done with sin and sor-row,

Ho - - ly Lord! _____

piú marcato
Done with sin and sor-row.
Ho - - ly Lord! _____

Example 3. *O, Holy Lord* (1916), Tonality of the two themes, mm. 21- 24.

The expansion and contraction of texture is another area of expression explored by Dett in *O, Holy Lord*. The first twenty-four measures are an expansion of texture within the themes of the first and second phrases of texts. The first eight measures introduce the themes through the men's voices in four-part divisi (TTBB). The next eight measures (mm 9-16) add the alto voices, and the soprano voices are added in the following eight measures (mm. 17-24). The texture continues to expand and finally reaches an eight-part divisi (SSAATTBB) in measure 25. Dett's uses this divisi across three octaves until measure 43. Measure 43 and 44 are unique for being the only unison passage in the entire piece. The stay is brief as it immediately returns to eight-part divisi in measure 45. The texture eventually starts to contract at measure 53 with the basses'

reintroduction of the second phrase of text. The contraction of the texture continues until measure 64. Dett maintains a four-part texture (SATB) through the final nine measures (ex. 5).

Dett's ability to compose in the style of spirituals is not limited to *O, Holy Lord*. Other choral works such as *Listen to the Lambs* (1914), *Don't Be Weary Traveler* (1921), and *Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler* (1924) also offers Dett's philosophy regarding spirituals. *Listen to the* is considered as Dett's most popular choral work. The original version is scored for eight-part mixed voices, but Dett later arranged it in four-parts for women's voices (1923). *Don't Be Weary Traveler* is an award-winning composition and is also among Dett's longest choral works. This piece won the Francis Boott Prize at Harvard in 1920 and was published a year later in 1921. It is scored for six-part mixed voices with an inscription by Dett that reads: a "Motet on Negro Folk Motives." *Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler* is a popular spiritual arranged by several composers during the lifetime of Nathaniel Dett. Dett's inscription to this work states that it is "A Negro Spiritual in the form of a short unaccompanied motet for mixed voices."

Listen to the Lambs is another outstanding example of using themes from spirituals to create an original composition. Dett develops the themes of this piece through the following features: antiphonal textures (dialogue between men's and women's voices), long durations against syncopated rhythm, and in the repetitions of the text. The work is structured in ternary form (ABA) with the A sections in d minor and the B section in F major. The pentatonic melody of the A sections is based on the traditional spiritual while the pentatonic melody of the B section is newly composed in a similar character as the A section melody

p *mf*
 Ho - - - - ly! Ho - ly! Ho - - - ly
p *mf*
 Ho - - - - ly! Ho - ly! Ho - - - ly
p *mf*
 Ho - - - - ly! Ho - ly! Ho - - - ly
p *mf*
 Ho - ly! Ho - ly! Ho - - - ly
 69 *p* *pp*
 Lord! Done with sin and sor - - row!
p *pp*
 Lord! Done with sin and sor - - row!
p *pp*
 Lord! Done with sin and sor - - row!
p *pp*
 Lord! Done with sin and sor - - row!

Example 4. *O, Holy Lord* (1916), Last nine measures and final section, mm. 65-73.

Dett sets the A sections as a dialogue between the men's and women's voices and uses repetition for tension. Arthur Lee Evans describes the tension of the A section as "wailing" and that the repetition of the texts provides this desired effect.¹⁴⁴ The B section features a soprano soloist singing a melody over held notes of the choir (mm. 53-59). Tension in this section is created through a descending chromatic movement and the repetition of the text "in his bosom" by the sopranos and basses (mm. 62-74). Carl Harris believed that this repetition (ex. 5) evolved from a common feature of spirituals that "musically expand a short, simple textual idea."¹⁴⁵

The return to A section is led through a modulatory passage (mm. 75-78) that concludes on the word "Listen." Dett provides instructions in the score to "prolong the n of the last syllable of listen into a hum." The last A section is considerably shorter than the first A section as Dett removes the antiphonal effect between the men and the women. However, Dett maintains this contrast in a complete texture as the women's voices continue their melodic theme as the men's voices receive a new melodic theme. This theme is presented within a strong rhythmic drive to the final cadence (mm. 87-98). The "wailing" of the first A section returns on the word "all" in all voices with the sopranos descending stepwise from a high A to a D below. The piece ends in unison on the word "Amen."

¹⁴⁴ Evans, "The Development of the Negro Spiritual as Choral Art Music," 83.

¹⁴⁵ Harris, "A Study of Characteristic Stylistic Trends," 45-6.

music. Dett was conscious of dialect used in the minstrel tradition and comedic-imitation of African American vocal inflections. In 1936, Dett stated, “It is possible that the publication of the spirituals in broad dialect has been an influence operating to keep these songs from formal religious worship; especially since dialect has been one of the peculiarly American means of obtaining a laugh not only at the Negro’s but at almost anybody’s expense.”¹⁴⁶ Dett’s use of “all a-crying” enhances the dramatic “wailing” expression of the work and does not distract from the meaning of the source material.

Dett was deliberate in delivering the exact intent for his music and his professional training prepared him to deliver that intent. Dett’s professional training benefitted his respect for spirituals throughout his career. As explained in chapter six, Dett was trained as a composer through study in Western music theory—an important area of Dett’s professional education. During his education, Dett developed skills that he utilized in his choral music. Two of Dett’s compositions, *Don’t Be Weary Traveler* and *Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler*, provide examples of how Dett’s professional training met his respect for spirituals. For example, the spiritual melody of *Don’t Be Weary Traveler* is treated through imitative entrances (ex. 6), and in *Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler* contrapuntally (ex. 7). Both imitation and counterpoint are important devices used by Western composers throughout music history to develop musical ideas. Dett’s intent was no different.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Nathaniel Dett, “The Development of the Negro Spiritual,” in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Fourth Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936), 4.

114

mp tranquilo

Wear - y trav - el - er, _____

mp tranquilo

Wear - y trav - el - er, _____ come a - long, _ come a - long, _

mp tranquilo

Wear - y trav - el - er, _____

mp tranquilo

Wear - y trav - el - er, _____ come, wear - y trav - el - er,

wear - y trav' - - ler, come a - long, _ come a - long, _

wear - y trav' - ler, come a - long, _ home.

Example 6. *Don't Be Weary Traveler* (1921), Imitative entrances, mm. 110-17.

Let us cheer the wear - y trav - el - er,

The wear - y trav - el - er, A - long - the heav'n - ly way,

The wear - y trav - el - er, A - long - the heav'n - ly way,

12 Let us

Cheer the wear - y trav - el - er; Let us

The wear - y trav - el - er A - long, the heav'n - ly way,

The wear - y trav - el - er A - long, the heav'n - ly way; Let us

cheer the wear - y trav - el - er A - long the heav'n - ly

Example 7. *Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler* (1924), Contrapuntal textures, mm. 9-14

The essays, reviews, and lectures by Nathaniel Dett provide the most meaningful interpretation to the intentions of his music. Jon Michael Spencer's *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader, Essays on Black Sacred Music* (1991) contains the largest collection of Dett's literary output.¹⁴⁷ Included in Spencer's work is Dett's thesis "Negro Music," (1920) for which he was

147

awarded the prestigious Bowdoin Prize by Harvard University in 1921. Dett's thesis is structured in four parts with the following essay titles: 1) "The Emancipation of Negro Music," 2) "The Development of Negro Secular Music," 3) "The Development of Negro Secular Music," and 4) "Negro Music of the Present." These essays also served as lectures throughout Dett's career.¹⁴⁸ Dett also prefaced his four groups (collections) of spirituals (1936) with essays and reviews on a variety of topics dealing with spirituals. Most noteworthy to this chapter are the essays from the Second Group, "Understanding the Negro Spiritual;" the Third Group, "The Authenticity of the Spiritual;" and the Fourth Group, "The Development of the Negro Spiritual." These essays appear towards the end Dett's career in 1936.

"Understanding the Negro Spiritual" appears in the Second Group and addresses the sincerity of the singing of spirituals. This was also a popular lecture given by Dett during his professional career. Dett explains that "for the proper rendition of any music, a knowledge of what was the intention of its creator is invaluable to the interpreter."¹⁴⁹ In this essay he explains the difference between the spirituals sung by slaves to the spirituals performed by ensembles during his lifetime. He concludes that different life experiences change the sincerity of the singing: "the interpretations are oftentimes [sic] meaningless because the interpreters have not the faintest idea of what they are singing about."¹⁵⁰

The Third Group essay is good source for the study of the musical characteristics of slave songs. In "The Authenticity of the Spiritual," Dett addresses critics that dispute the origins of spirituals belonging to the experience of slavery. While Dett does not list the critics by name, he

¹⁴⁸ McBrier, "The Life and Works of Robert Nathaniel Dett," 62.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Nathaniel Dett, "Understanding the Negro Spiritual," in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Second Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936), 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

does counter their theories with evidence from the musical characteristics of slave songs. In this essay Dett discusses rhythm, melody, harmony, and texts of slave songs. Dett describes rhythm as the most “vital element” of slave songs with the rhythmic characteristic of syncopation the clearest signs of originality.¹⁵¹ Dett also provides “music theory” for slave songs in his discussion of the modes and melodic characteristics with origins to Africa. His discussion of harmony is the shortest. In this section, he describes less about the harmony of slave songs and more about what they are not. In the final section of the essay Dett presents his strongest arguments for the authenticity of spirituals while simultaneously advocating for the worth of the texts in spirituals.

“The Development of the Negro Spiritual” is the essay with reviews included in the final Fourth Group of the Dett Collection. This essay traces the development of the spiritual from the decade before the American Civil War (1850). In this essay, Dett confronts many of the subject presented in the chapters of this disquisition: emancipation, social perceptions, negro musicians (jubilee and minstrels), musical nationalism (Dvořák and Burleigh), and his compositional-philosophy. Dett also acknowledges William Dawson in this essay for the “furore which greeted the playing by Philadelphia Orchestra of the Negro Symphony by Mr. William H. Dawson.”¹⁵² Dett mentions his awareness of the Dawson’s spirituals in the succeeding sentence. The final paragraph illustrates Dett optimism for the future and the efforts of others to make the spiritual

¹⁵¹ Robert Nathaniel Dett, “The Authenticity of the Spiritual,” in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Third Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936), 3.

¹⁵² Robert Nathaniel Dett, “The Development of the Negro Spiritual,” in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Fourth Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936), 4.

more accessible. Dett concludes that “The spirit of return to the beginning of things has been largely my source of inspiration in working with folk song motifs.”¹⁵³

Dett’s treatment of spirituals (folk song motifs) was truly inspired. His hope of providing greater accessibility to spirituals for people of all races still inspires today. This inspiration is magnified further when viewed from the social climate of his day. Dett struggled against this climate to preserve the legacy of spirituals as American folk songs. His struggles were not only for African Americans, but for all Americans and extended to the rest of the world. These songs were important to the history of the United States and Dett did not want to see them lost.

Dett’s choral music reiterates this hope in its treatment of spirituals. His professional education provided him training to integrate spirituals within Western music traditions, while his literary output supports a belief that other composers could do the same. Dett’s legacy of hope is supported in his belief that spirituals would one day receive respect by composers. His legacy considers that one day these songs would be enjoy performance by ensembles of every race.

Dett summarizes this intent in his essay on “Understanding the Negro Spiritual.” This passage from the essay clearly defines his legacy of hope through the following words:

The complaint that many modern Negro choirs have lost the “old time flavor” of the spirituals is reasonable since the urge which produced such a flavor no longer exists. The charge that white people cannot sing spirituals like Negroes is also reasonable since few whites have ever known the sufferings of bondage. But it is also reasonable that if singers of whatever extraction will do, while singing these songs, what the originators did—make them a vehicle for giving thanks to God for all His benefits, for the utterance of prayers for strength, and the betterment of their lives and the world about them.¹⁵⁴

Dett’s continues from the thoughts of this passage to outline his legacy of hope. His statements remain relevant for us today. Dett provides that the race of the singer is negligible when the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁴ Dett, “Understanding the Negro Spiritual,” 4.

music is performed as intended. When we perform the music as intended we will take part in a legacy of gratitude, strength, and hope for a better life for the world around us.

CHAPTER 10. THE LEGACY OF HOPE: THE CHORAL MUSIC OF WILLIAM LEVI DAWSON

This chapter examines the significance of the choral music by William Levi Dawson to the choral repertoire from the United States. Dawson is among the most significant composers to write arrangements of spirituals. Several of his works continue to remain popular nearly a century from when they were written. Among the reasons for this continued popularity is the way in which Dawson sets his music to remain faithful to the original content (folk songs). His respect for this content provides an emotional depth to his arrangements that is accessible to both singers and audiences.

Throughout his lengthy career, Dawson sought to interpret an authentic meaning and value for folk-songs (spirituals) in his music. His choral music communicates this intent through his deep emotional connection to spirituals and its origins in slavery. Dawson's respect for this origin is reflected throughout his career, and his compositions are crafted through this admiration. His choral music based on these folk-songs harbor an emotional connection and respect for the past. This is Dawson's *legacy*. Dawson's music also indicates a belief that spirituals offer singers and audiences of all races an opportunity to emotionally connect. I interpret this as Dawson's *hope*.

The pursuit of this hope by Dawson also reflects legacies that began with jubilee choirs and minstrel troupes. As provided in Part 1, these late nineteenth-century performing ensembles greatly influenced the development of music in the United States. Dawson's legacy of hope blends characteristics of these ensembles and their music. Like jubilee choirs, Dawson fosters deep religious expression in his choral music. This religious expression is universal and accessible to every race. The popularity of jubilee songs held this same characteristic in their

presentation to audiences. Dawson's choral music also displays musical characteristics found in minstrelsy—namely, the use of dialect. However, dialect in the choral music of Dawson is far less objectionable in comparison to minstrel traditions.¹⁵⁵ The primary difference—in the context of Dawson's choral music—is in his deep-level of respect. Dawson provides a perfect balance between these two legacies because of respect for the origin and development of spirituals.

William Dawson's respect for the past is evident throughout his career and referenced by several sources that discuss his life and music. This chapter reviews sources (e.g., books, dissertations, articles, interviews) that reveal evidence of Dawson's hope of bringing people together through the performance of spirituals. In addition, the evidence supported by these sources are examined through selected choral music by William Dawson. The examination of Dawson's choral music substantiates evidence from the reviewed sources about his respect for the past and his hopes for the future.

The sources reviewed for this chapter include a variety of studies on William Dawson. Several dissertations are the most comprehensive sources to offer the hopes and thoughts of Dawson. These dissertations include studies about Dawson as an educator, conductor, and composer. In addition, several of the studies consider primary sources such as interviews with William Dawson, personal letters, writings, and rare manuscripts. Other meaningful sources include peer-reviewed articles and chapters from books that specifically discuss Dawson in the context of other composers.

The source that most benefits the study of this chapter is the 1991 dissertation by William Robert McMillan. McMillan's dissertation, "The Choral Music of William Dawson" considers a

¹⁵⁵ Minstrel composers such as James Bland began to experiment with dialect to lessen stereotypes. Some of his arrangements are also less objectionable than other minstrel composers from the same period.

history of spirituals, a biography of Dawson, and an analysis of Dawson's choral compositions.¹⁵⁶ In addition, McMillan also classifies all fifty-six compositions of Dawson by musical form and through the following three categories: 1) leader-response, 2) slow-sustained, and 3) fragmentary-syncopated. Another notable dissertation that provides specific detail from Dawson's life and career is Mark Hugh Malone's "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator."¹⁵⁷ Malone's dissertation, written a decade earlier, is significant because it includes rare information supported through his own interviews with William Dawson. Malone also contributes to the life and music of Dawson through an article in the *Choral Journal* entitled "William Dawson and the Tuskegee Choir."¹⁵⁸ The article by Malone appeared in the *Choral Journal* one month before the death of William Dawson. It provides concert reviews that detail the impact of Dawson's choir and arrangements. The most recent dissertation to address William Dawson is the 2013 dissertation by Vernon Edward Huff. Huff's dissertation, "William Levi Dawson: An Examination of Selected Letters, Speeches, and Writings" examines a selection of letters, speeches, and notes by William Dawson that are held within the archives at Emory University.¹⁵⁹ His study provides information not available to the previous dissertations mentioned. Huff's research presents new insights of Dawson and his music.

These sources strengthen this chapter through their author's insight of Dawson's choral music over the span of his career. McMillan attributes fifty-six choral compositions (forty-seven

¹⁵⁶ William Robert McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1991).

¹⁵⁷ Mark Hugh Malone, "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1981).

¹⁵⁸ Mark Hugh Malone, "William Dawson and the Tuskegee Choir," *Choral Journal* 30, no. 8 (Mar. 1990): 17-19.

¹⁵⁹ Vernon Edward Huff, "William Levi Dawson: An Examination of Selected Letters, Speeches, and Writings," (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2013).

spirituals) published by William Dawson during his career and speculates that unpublished compositions may exist within the archives of Tuskegee University.¹⁶⁰ Of the fifty-six compositions listed are a total of twenty-nine titles that Dawson set for various voicings (i.e, SATB, TTBB, SSA, SSAA) from the year 1925 until 1974. According to Malone, Dawson published his first arrangements in 1925 while employed by the music publisher H. T. Fitz-Simons.¹⁶¹ The following five years witnessed the publication of seven titles (twelve compositions) by Dawson with the publishers Fitz-Simmons, Remick, and Kjos. A remarkable relationship between Dawson's choral music and the Neil A. Kjos Music Company began in 1929 with his composition *Out in the Fields* (1929). This same year marked the return of Dawson to his alma mater—the Tuskegee Institute. The return to Alabama proved to be the most productive period of Dawson's career.

William Dawson service at Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) solidified his reputation as an educator, composer, and conductor. From the 1930 until 1956, Dawson served as the Director of the School of Music, conductor of the choral ensembles, and professor of several musical courses at Tuskegee.¹⁶² Malone supports that Dawson reputation increased because of his role as conductor of Tuskegee's choral ensembles. These ensembles performed his choral arrangements which subsequently increased the popularity of his works.¹⁶³ Nearly half of Dawson's choral music, including twelve new titles, were composed during his tenure at Tuskegee. Included within the twelve new titles are compositions the are still frequently

¹⁶⁰ McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson," 136-8.

¹⁶¹ Malone, "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator," 52.

¹⁶² Malone, "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator," 66.

¹⁶³ Malone, "William Dawson and the Tuskegee Choir," 17.

performed such as *Soon-Ah Will Be Done* (1934), *Ain'a That Good News* (1937), *Steal Away* (1942), *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* (1946), and *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (1946).

McMillan considers these popular compositions as part of Dawson's middle period (i.e., Dawson's tenure at Tuskegee).¹⁶⁴ McMillan's study provides three periods of compositional output for Dawson: first (1925 to 1929), middle (1930-1955), and last (1955-1978).¹⁶⁵ His study includes an analysis of Dawson's choral music in form, melody, rhythm, harmony, and through expressive devices (e.g., dynamics, articulations). The analysis of these elements provides their comparison across the three periods and within all fifty-six-choral works. McMillan reveals several commonalities in these periods and works; specifically, in his analysis of Dawson's middle period.

Dawson's choral music of the middle period, including his most frequently performed, share the most similarities through the following: 1) form, 2) harmony, 3) rhythm, and 4) articulations. These similarities represent the most common characteristics of his choral music from this period. Each of the four areas may include the same compositional approach but almost always include some level of variation. For instance, Dawson preferred strophic form for his music compositions, but often altered the form through extensions.¹⁶⁶ An example is found in *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* that extends the last strophe by three measures to function as a coda (ex. 8). The strophic compositions also show a tendency to maintain harmonic progressions from strophe-to-strophe. Variations to harmonic progressions typically occur at the end of a section or at the end of the work.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson," 95.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 97. McMillan states that fifty out of fifty-six pieces are in strophic form.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

The image shows a musical score for five voices: Solo, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in a key with three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and starts in 2/4 time, changing to 4/4 in the second measure. The lyrics are: "Com-ing for to car-ry me home, car-ry me home." The Solo part has a long rest in the first measure and then enters in the second measure. The Soprano part has a melodic line in the first measure and a long note in the second. The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts all have similar melodic lines in the first measure and long notes in the second.

Example 8. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (1946), mm. 29-31.

McMillan adds that, with exception to three arrangements, Dawson was very conservative in his harmonic progressions. McMillan found that *Oh, What A Beautiful City* (1934), *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*, and *Steal Away* each feature “a more complex harmony in subsequent strophes.”¹⁶⁸ However, in *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* the only “complex” change to the harmonic progression occurs in the second strophe (mm. 16-21). The first and third (final)

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

strophes are very similar in the harmonic progression; Dawson varies the texture more than the harmony.

In the second strophe of *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*, Dawson embellishes the harmonic progressions by adding suspensions, passing tones, and chromatic alterations. An example of a suspension is found in measure 17 where the alto voice moves from a IV^7 on beat 1 and then resolves to a ii^6 on beat 2. In the first strophe, this area is presented as a root position IV chord (measure 2). Passing tones, which are not present in the first strophe, are added to the alto and bass voices in measure 22. The altos and basses also receive chromatic alterations in the strophe's harmonic progression. Dawson adds accidentals or uses the minor second interval to suggest tension and movement. These alterations are not present in the first strophe (ex. 9).

Harmony is important for developing musical ideas in the arrangements by Dawson. Harmony also represented an important area of focus in his role as an educator. Malone supports that Dawson required his students to consistently strengthen their skills with harmony. In his dissertation on Dawson as educator, Malone offers, "Every member of the chorus was required to bring a 'Harmony Pad' to rehearsals. Students wrote and sang intervals, as sight and sound were paired in the teaching process."¹⁶⁹

A third commonality exists in the rhythmic quality of Dawson's arrangements. As stated in chapter five, the connection between spirituals and its rhythmic characteristics is deeply rooted. Specifically, rhythmic devices such as syncopation. McMillan states that out of forty-seven arrangements of spirituals by Dawson, forty-one employ syncopated patterns.¹⁷⁰ The examples

¹⁶⁹ Malone, "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator," 138.

¹⁷⁰ McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson," 110.

he cites in his study include various rhythmic durations in short-to-long combinations (e.g., sixteenth-note-eighth-note, quarter-note-half-note, eighth-note-dotted quarter-note).

Soprano
Ev - 'ry time I feel the spir - it, mov - ing

Alto
Ev - 'ry time I feel the spir - it, mov - ing

Tenor
Ev - 'ry time I feel the spir - it, mov - ing

Bass
Ev - 'ry time I feel the spir - it, mov - ing

I — IV7 ii6 IV

19

Sop.
in my heart, I will pray; _____

Alto
in my heart, I will pray; _____

Ten.
in my heart, I will pray; _____

Bass
in my heart, I will pray; _____

Chromatic alteration

Example 9. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* (1946), Harmonic variance, mm. 16-20.

However, his study only considers the predominant use of syncopation in Dawson’s choral music. McMillan states that *Soon-Ah Will Be Done* “does not employ syncopation” which is true statement only in view of the work in its entirety.¹⁷¹ An example of syncopation does exist, however, within the extension of the second strophe (mm. 37-47). Syncopation is featured on the text “weepin’” and “wailin’” in typical short-to-long rhythmic patterns (ex. 10). Because this is the only occurrence, McMillan is justified in his assessment.

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in 4/4 time, key of D major. The score covers measures 38, 39, and 40. The lyrics are: "No more weep - in', No more wail - in', No weep - in', No wail - in'". The music features syncopated rhythms, particularly in the vocal lines, with accents and dynamic markings like *fz* (forzando) and *>* (accent). Measure numbers 38, 39, and 40 are indicated above the staves.

Example 10. *Soon-Ah Will Be Done* (1934), Syncopated Patterns, mm. 37-40.

The rhythmic nature of spirituals and African American music was always present in the life of Dawson. Dawson was deeply connected to rhythm because it was deeply connected to his musical experiences. Chapter seven shares an interview of Dawson who mentions an early experience with rhythm from his youth. Later in life, just prior to his arrival at Tuskegee, William Dawson joined a dance band called the "Doctors of Syncopation."¹⁷² Dawson played several instruments for this ensemble that emphasized their “mastery” of rhythm through their

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 110.

¹⁷² Malone, “William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator,” 53.

band's name. The musical experiences with rhythm strengthen Dawson's own study of spirituals. As a result, Dawson preserves the rhythmic qualities of spirituals in his choral music.

Articulations also served in the role of preserving the rhythmic qualities of spirituals in Dawson's choral music. Dawson consistent use of articulations enhances the expressing of text his arrangements. McMillan states that every choral work by Dawson "has some marking to indicate a special articulation."¹⁷³ His analysis of Dawson's choral music reveals three functions for his articulations that are based on the type of arrangement. The first function mentioned is the use of articulation for "marks of attack" in faster arrangements.¹⁷⁴ In slower arrangements, Dawson uses fewer articulations but increases the use of dynamic markings. The final function mentioned occurs to emphasize syncopation.¹⁷⁵

There is a Balm in Gilead (1939) is a slower arrangement by Dawson that includes special articulations. The included articulations include: 1) accent, 2) tenuto, and 3) portato (articulated legato markings). As suggested by McMillan, dynamic instructions are increased for this piece. These instructions are found most often across one measure as passages of crescendo and decrescendo.

The accent mark is used by Dawson to emphasize a specific word or syllable in a phrase. An example is found in measure 24 on the soloist's staff with the syllable "-vives" from the word "revives." Interestingly, the bass voices have the same accent mark and at the same moment even though they are performing on a "hum." This appears to indicate Dawson's desire to emphasize

¹⁷³ McMillan, "The Choral Music of William Dawson," 114.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

this moment in the phrase. In view of the entire arrangement, the accent mark most frequently appears on the word “there” in the phrase “There is a Balm.”

The tenuto mark is also used by Dawson to emphasize a word or to provide an appropriate character of sound to that word. It appears most frequently above the words “heal” (ex. 11) and “wounded.” The word “wounded” also receives a special dynamic marking (crescendo-decrescendo) across the word but not the measure. This can be seen in combination with the tenuto markings in measure 12. The example of this combination of dynamics instructions with the tenuto markings indicates methods used by Dawson to further “illustrate the word.”¹⁷⁶

There is a Balm in Gilead also uses a portato (articulated legato) mark as a special articulation. Even though this specific mark is found predominantly in instrumental music, it is not unusual considering Dawson’s instrumental background. This articulation combines two markings (tenuto and staccato) to indicate a “pulsation” effect on the word “sin” (ex. 11). This combination of the marking is only found above the word “sin” although a similar articulation appears on the soloist staff in measure 42. Dawson combines a tenuto mark with an accent mark to emphasize the word “died.” Because of the sound of the plosive consonants in “died,” the marking should be considered as more of a special type of emphasis than as a pulsation as with the word “sin.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 114.

Example 11. *There is a Balm in Gilead* (1939), *Articulations*, m. 33.

Melody is also area that deserves a brief mention in view of Dawson’s choral music. The connection between Dawson and the past are undeniable in his use of preexisting spiritual melodies. Rarely does Dawson alter either the melody or its texts beyond a few pitches or syllables. McMillan adds that Dawson’s melodies “remain similar to those found in various collections.”¹⁷⁷ These melodies and texts were important to Dawson’s legacy of hope and emphasized during his time as educator. According to Malone, “He wanted to continue the emphasis placed on ‘plantation melodies’ which had been initiated by Tuskegee's founder. Dawson saw to it that Negro folk idioms were stressed in all phases of the music program.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 108-9.

¹⁷⁸ Malone, “William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator,” 66.

Dawson advocated for spirituals beyond the campus of Tuskegee. His advocacy included the United States and the rest of the world. His arrangements for his choirs at Tuskegee served in this advocacy. The concert tours of the Tuskegee choirs became a world-renowned ensemble while under the direction of William Dawson. The ensemble performed and promoted Dawson's choral music at the grand opening of Radio City Music Hall (1932), for two United States' Presidents (1932 and 1933), through national broadcasts (radio and television), and several national and international tours.¹⁷⁹

Mark Malone describes the impact of Dawson's arrangements and the Tuskegee choirs through a series of concert reviews. These reviews illustrate the high esteem of both Dawson and his choral music. In a review from February of 1933, Stirling Bowen endorsed William Dawson in *The Wall Street Journal* as a demanding and effective conductor. Bowen describes Dawson's conducting in the following passage:

In his style of directing, William L. Dawson, conductor of the Tuskegee Institute Choir, is partly prophet, partly plain old fashioned deacon. With the aid of his strong and expressive hands he delivers a sermon in pantomime with every number. And if there is any advantage, it is with the simpler side of him - the deacon side as against the prophet. In spite of the fastidiousness of Mr. Dawson's attitude toward his music, his directorial gestures are as paddle-footed as the gait of a middle-aged waiter. This is all a part of the essential simplicity of his approach.¹⁸⁰

A review two months later in the *American Business Survey* describes the ensemble's ability to interpret Dawson's conducting and music. This review by an anonymous author offers the following account about the choir's ability:

If the Tuskegee Choir prides itself most on anyone thing, I imagine it would be its pianissimo. By last night's showing, it can spin out a whispery phrase like a barely audible sigh, and hold it longer than any group I know. Choirmaster William L. Dawson

¹⁷⁹ Malone, "William Dawson and the Tuskegee Choir," 17-19.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

has trained the school unit to calm finesse and split-second timing. The balances last night never tilted faultily, and the group at times rang out like one voice.¹⁸¹

Other early concert reviews cited by Malone are similar in content. Common and frequent among the other reviews are descriptions about expressive singing and Dawson's arrangements.

Later reviews continue to highlight both Dawson's arrangements and the ability of his choirs. A review by Glenn Dillard Gunn from 1946 is perhaps the most specific review cited by Malone on the musical characteristics of Dawson's arrangements. Gunn's concert review provides the following description of Dawson's arrangements:

All of these matters of technique, of choral highlights and shadows, of appealing solo voices exploited incidentally, are secondary considerations. Foremost there remained always the melodic beauty, the deep feeling, the impulse of urgent rhythms, the rhapsodic freedom, and finally, the persistent pathos of the music itself, a quality it possesses in greater degree than any other folk music known to the western world, though some Russian echoes have reached us that seem to share it.¹⁸²

Malone also cites reviews that describe the public reaction to hearing these musical characteristics of Dawson's arrangements. Max de Schauense reflected on a program of Dawson and his arrangements of spirituals in a separate review from 1946. His review comments, "There were such old favorites as 'Deep River,' 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' and 'Every Time I Feel the Spirit.' However, one had the sensation of hearing, these for the first time, so reverently and authentically were they sung."¹⁸³ This review also provides that "the Tuskegee Choir sings everything a cappella" and that "Its intonation is perfect; its rhythm, the rhythm of a people whose mainspring it is."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

These reviews indicate that the relationship between Dawson's arrangements and the extraordinary abilities of his choirs at Tuskegee were important to the emotional (expressive) aspects of his music. Following his resignation from Tuskegee in 1956, Dawson spread this relationship between his music and singers as a guest conductor and clinician. The international and national demand for Dawson in this capacity remained high for the remainder of his career. His reputation as a composer and conductor provided several opportunities to address the expressive qualities of his music.

Many of these opportunities after his tenure at Tuskegee are referenced in documents meticulously kept by Dawson. These documents are now stored in collections at Emory University's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). Research by Vernon Huff at MARBL considers these documents. Included in Huff's research are a selection of letters, speeches, and other writings that detail—among several areas—Dawson's thoughts on his arrangements. In reflection of Dawson as an arranger Huff concludes, "As an arranger of Negro spirituals, Dawson was aware of the importance of his work. Beyond the national acclaim he earned, he was writing music not only for choral groups of the mid-twentieth century, but for succeeding generations of conductors and singers."¹⁸⁵

Huff also cites a "single three-by-five index card" where Dawson wrote several other general thoughts about folk music (spirituals). On this index card are two thoughts that represent Dawson's legacy of hope. The first states that "To connect the past with the present and predict the future, we must go to our folk music. From our folk music we derive our virtues, and moral

¹⁸⁵ Huff, "William Levi Dawson," 25.

excellence, our good qualities.”¹⁸⁶ Dawson’s connection and respect for the origins of spirituals is apparent within this thought.

One other thought on the index card simply offers, “Love, togetherness, no hate.” Huff correctly interprets Dawson’s thought when he comments, “in singing, writing, performing, and sharing this music, a people can come together.”¹⁸⁷ Within Dawson’s legacy of hope is the desire for people of all races to come together through the sharing of spirituals. Though his respect for that past recognizes the achievements and struggles of one race, his hope for the future is envisioned for all.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 11. CONCLUSION

One of the most enduring legacies of the choral music by Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson is in their preservation of spirituals for future generations. Both Dett and Dawson are active in elevating the status of the spiritual from its folk songs roots. We can observe their success within the greater number of spirituals in today's choral repertoire. We owe this benefit to those who contributed to preserving this music for future generations.

Following the American Civil War, the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) provided an increase in performance opportunities for African American musicians. This increase inspired musical developments and impacted societies' perspectives of African Americans on a national and international level. African American composers were trained at a small number of educational institutions and conservatories in the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, these professionally-trained composers influenced musical nationalism in the United States. They were swept into a distinct movement that desired an American brand of nationalism through the merging of spirituals (American folk songs) and several European music forms (e.g., cantata, opera, motet, oratorio, and symphony). The subsequent generation of composers, active during the early twentieth century, shouldered this responsibility and transported it to the historical black colleges and universities where they taught. This new generation, the generation of Nathaniel Dett and William Dawson, were sensitive to the past but intently focused on the future of music in America. Their generation—their legacy—contributes significantly to the continuity of music by African Americans and to music from the United States.

The concert spirituals of Dett and Dawson are built on musical traditions of the past but bear a vision for the future of American music. Each composer commanded their perspective of performance practices that were explored by ensembles following the American Civil War.

Through their efforts, Dett and Dawson ensured the preservation of spirituals in Western art music. Their contributions towards the future of American music was never intended only for their race; but, rather to enter characteristics of African American music in discussions of the United States' musical identity. Due to the nature of racial and ethnic relations in American society, the careers of Dett and Dawson reflect a struggle in achieving this objective. Too often these composers encountered the racial sentiments of American society mirrored within their musical careers.

Much has certainly changed since the lifetimes of Dett and Dawson. However, we cannot risk thinking that progress made indicates that our job is complete. The racial tensions encountered by Dett and Dawson in the United States still casts a shadow over our society. We view this currently in social movements that campaign against perceived systemic racism (e.g., racial profiling, police brutality) such as Black Lives Matter. A solution to fully eradicate issues of race eluded the generation of Dett and Dawson and continues to elude ours today.

The public's view of our progress often differs because race relations is a complicated issue. Fully understanding this issue as an influence of Dett and Dawson as composers has been equally complex. Rather than tackle the impossible task of unravelling this complexity, the preceding chapters explored specific components of social change in the musical development of spirituals.

Exploration of social change in the United States provides a specific setting to interpret the concert spirituals by Dett and Dawson. By recreating specific aspects of this setting, we extend our understanding of Dett and Dawson according to their time and place in history. By understanding this setting, we may begin to interpret how their works symbolize a legacy of hope—a belief that the future will be better than the past.

The Legacy of Hope

In this disquisition, I have coined the phrase “legacy of hope” to interpret the aspirations of Dett and Dawson. This phrase refers to their hopes for the future of American folk-songs (spirituals) with respect to their ideas of social change. I interpret Dett’s legacy of hope as a new respect for spirituals through performances by all ensembles—regardless of race. I interpret Dawson’s legacy of hope as a belief that spirituals offer all races an opportunity to connect emotionally. Dett and Dawson were born during the period of racial segregation but still held great interest in bringing people together. Racial equality necessitates efforts by all; Dett and Dawson recognized the power of the spiritual in reaching this goal. Their legacies are remarkable for their lifetimes and continue to hold significance today. The music we make can also serve in bringing people together.

We contribute to the same legacies of hope as Dett and Dawson when we display respect for the meaning and value of spirituals. The choral conductor plays a pivotal role in facilitating this respect. The efforts of the choral conductor govern the success or failure of their contributions. The more ways the conductor can foster and integrate a respect for spirituals into rehearsals and performances, then the greater their contribution.

The choral conductor should focus their efforts on areas that strengthen their likelihood of success. I will address the following three areas I feel are most critical for these efforts: 1) avoiding a sole focus on race-specific traits, 2) confronting research needs, and 3) providing meaningful objectives for the choral ensemble. The first area believes that a sole focus on the race-specific traits of spirituals works against bringing people together. The second area shows how increased research (e.g., score study) will enhance the performance of spirituals today. The

final area suggests strategies to implement meaningful musical and social objectives for choral ensembles.

For this first area, I believe that we must all first acknowledge the value of spirituals to American music. These songs do not belong *only* to black America, they belong to *all* of America. Examples from the choral music of Dett and Dawson illustrates how music can incorporate multiple musical traditions. Both composers were professionally-trained musicians influenced by a variety of different musical traditions—specifically, European musical traditions. When we focus solely on the race-specific traits of spirituals, then the pervading attitude of hope within this genre collapses.

It is possible to honor the race-specific roots of spirituals and advocate for characteristics that are universal to every race. The legacy of hope of Dett and Dawson accomplishes this goal. Their choral music addresses both the African American experience in America and advocates for commonalities shared by every race. It is important that we remember that at the heart of the spiritual is community—voices of people believing together. Society benefits when spirituals are interpreted to reflect all communities. This focus creates not only a stronger society, but also a closer connection to the music.

My second point urges increased research of spirituals. If we are to fully explore how to honor the past and advocate for the future we must increase our understandings of spirituals. Choral conductors, as contributors to the legacy of hope, should understand the breadth of African American heritage. This is not to contradict my early statement against race-specific focus, but rather to recognize that this is a historically neglected area of study in education. Conductors profit when they expand their knowledge of the African American experience in America. Focusing on their humanity is important when measuring this experience. More focus

on the group's humanity respects the value of spirituals to society. When greater knowledge is combined with respect, a conductor will more likely create meaningful performances. The same could be said for the study of any other specific genre of music (e.g., motets, chorales, madrigals, etc.).

Conductors should devise methods within their study of spirituals to connect singers and audiences to the music. Increased knowledge of spirituals allows conductors to synthesize their methods to relate specifically towards their ensembles. Less diversity in an ensemble may result in more creativity and research required by the conductor. More diversity may present opportunities to combine multiple perspectives. Navigating either extreme requires tact by the conductor. However, increased score study offers more ways a conductor can speak about and connect others to the value of spirituals.

The third area supports that as knowledge is expanded, choral conductors can provide more informed musical and social objectives for their ensembles. The conductor should critically select spirituals that will best develop objectives within their ensembles. Because of its high educational value, critically-selected spirituals cultivate objectives. Dett's and Dawson's choral music serve as examples of this potential.

Success is further increased when objectives are meaningful. This is absent, for instance, when spirituals are selected only to serve as a concert opener or closer, as the "multicultural piece," or to fill any other niche. This focus on entertainment lacks any meaningful objective other than to entertain. This function risks undermining the respect for spirituals. In some cases, this may even resemble the same disrespect that was prevalent in early minstrel shows. Dett and Dawson worked tirelessly to avoid this scenario. However, when spirituals function in this

capacity, clearer objectives should also exist. These objectives should engage the ensemble's mind to connect emotionally beyond the spiritual's capacity to entertain.

As choral conductors, we must consider deeply the power of our profession to the world in which we live. Choral music has the power to assert social and political change. Spirituals have the power to champion for closer bonds among people of different races. Only time will tell whether the world, as proposed in the legacies of Dett and Dawson, will thoroughly experience amiable race relations. What is important is that we continue to press toward finding this answer—that we continue to hope and advocate for hope with the same audacity as Dett and Dawson.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Book Chapters

- Allen, William Francis, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison eds. *Slave Songs of the United States*. 1867. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1995.
- Anderson, Paul Allen. *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Brooks, Tilford. *America's Black Musical Heritage*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
- Caulfield Mina Davis, "Slavery and the Origins of Black Culture: Elkins Revisited." In *Americans from Africa: Slavery and Its Aftermath*, edited by Peter Rose, 171-193. New York: Atherton Press, 1970.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: Seabury Press, 1972.
- Cuney-Hare, Maud. *Negro Musicians and their Music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1974.
- Dett, Robert Nathaniel. "Understanding the Negro Spiritual." In *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Second Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936).
- _____. "The Authenticity of the Spiritual," In *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Third Group* (Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936).
- _____. "The Development of the Negro Spiritual." In *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals: Fourth Group*. Chicago: Hall and McCreary, 1936.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "The Sorrow Songs." Chap. XV in *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1994.
- Epstein, Dena. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Fisher, Miles Mark. *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1953 and 1992.
- Floyd, Samuel, Jr. "Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview." In *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990.
- _____. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Holland, Ted. *This Day in African-American Music*. San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1993.

- Holly, Ellistine Perkins. *Biographies of Black Composers and Songwriters: A Supplementary Textbook*. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1990.
- Hugins Nathan. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford Press, 1971.
- Johnson, Hall. "Notes on the Negro Spiritual," In *Readings in Black American Music*, edited by Eileen Southern. New York: W. W. Norton, 1971.
- Johnson, James Weldon, and J. Rosamond Johnson. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*. New York: The Viking Press, 1942.
- Johnson Harry. *Negotiating the Mainstream*. Chicago: The American Library Association, 1978.
- Katz, Bernard, ed. *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Locke, Alain L. *The Negro and His Music*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- _____. *The New Negro*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Lovell, John, Jr. *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1972.
- McBrier, Vivian Flag. *R. Nathaniel Dett: His Life and Works*. Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1977.
- Nathan, Hans. *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.
- Peters, Erskine. *Lyrics of the Afro-American Spiritual*. A Documentary Collection. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Encyclopedia of Black Music, Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Russell, Ralph Anthony. "A Black Composer Speaks: William Levi Dawson." in *Black Lives: Essays in African American Biography*, edited by James L. Conyers Jr., 110-116. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999.
- Rublowsky, John. *Black Music in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1971.
- Simpson Anne Key. *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993.
- Smythe, Mabel M., ed. *The Black American Reference Book*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976.
- Southall, Geneva Handy. "Art Music of the Blacks in the Nineteenth Century." In *Reflections on Afro-American Music*, edited by Dominique-René de Lerma, 161-179. Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1973.
- Southern, Eileen. *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982.

- _____. *Readings in Black American Music*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1971.
- _____. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1971.
- Strausbaugh, John. *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult and Imitation in American Popular Culture*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006.
- Thomas, Andre. *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*. Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007.
- Trice, Patricia. *Choral Arrangements of the African-American Spiritual: Historical Overview and Annotated Listings*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Ward Andrew. *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers, Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Washington, Booker T, *The Story of My Life and Work*. Chicago: J. L. Nichols, 1900.
- _____. *Up from Slavery*. South Kingstown, RI: Millennium Publications, 2015.
- White, Evelyn Davidson. *Choral Music by African-American Composers. A Selected Annotated Bibliography*. 2nd ed. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1996.
- Wright Josephine R. B. "Art/Classical Music." In *African America Music: An Introduction*, edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Work, John W. *Folk Songs of the American Negro*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.

Dissertations

- Evans, Arthur Lee. "The Development of the Negro Spiritual as Choral Art Music by Afro-American Composers with an Annotated Guide to the Performance of Selected Spirituals." PhD diss., University of Miami, 1972.
- Graham, Sandra J. "The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The Beginnings of an American Tradition." PhD diss. New York University, 2001.
- Harris, Carl Gordon. "A Study of Characteristic Stylistic Trends Found in the Choral Works of a Selected Group of Afro-American Composers and Arrangers." DMA diss., University of Missouri, 1972.
- Vernon Edward Huff, "William Levi Dawson: An Examination of Selected Letters, Speeches, and Writings." DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2013.
- Malone, Mark Hugh. "William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator." PhD diss., Florida State University, 1981.
- McBrier, Vivian Flagg. "The Life and Works of Robert Nathaniel Dett." PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1967.

McMillan, William Robert. "The Choral Music of William Dawson." DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1991.

Journal Articles

"Convention Highlights." *Choral Journal* 15, no. 6 (February 1975).

Epstein, Dena J. "A White Origin for the Black Spiritual? An Invalid Theory and How It Grew." *American Music* 1 (Summer 1983): 53-59.

Graziano, John. "The Use of Dialect in African-American Spirituals, Popular Songs, and Folk Songs," *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 261-268.
www.jstor.org/stable/4145494.

Malone, Mark Hugh. "William Dawson and the Tuskegee Choir." *Choral Journal* 30, no. 8 (Mar. 1990): 17-19.